

# THE ARGOSY.

APRIL, 1878.

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## POMEROY ABBEY.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

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### CHAPTER X.

#### THE QUARREL.

THE round grey stone building, not large, but very old, called the Keep, stood near to the back of the Abbey of Pomeroy, its walls overgrown with moss. A gentle slope of green grass descended from it, then came a level dell, and then, on another gentle slope rose the rear, or west pile of the abbey. This rear had neither entrance nor window; no look-out of any kind: you must travel round to the front before you could get in.

Sitting near the Keep on the dry and warm grass one hot day in the beginning of October, was the lovely Lady of Pomeroy. She had thrown herself there in listlessness: for the old listlessnesses at times clung to her yet. Pacing the dell before her, was the nurse bearing the infant, now some two months old. The anticipated heir, so anxiously expected and for whom great rejoicings had been planned, had turned out to be a pretty little girl. The Lord of Pomeroy did not appear to care for the disappointment: better luck next time, he said. He loved the child just as much as he would have loved the heir; ay, and was as proud of it. The rejoicings were to be held all the same: they had been delayed until his wife should be thoroughly restored to strength. Then the invitations went out, and on the morrow the abbey would be filled with guests. Guy had taken advantage of his last day of leisure to ride to Owlstone: and his wife sat, as you see, on the grass, before the old and uninhabited Keep.

"Bridget, is the baby sleeping?"

"Just going off, madam."

"Then take her indoors."

Bridget moved towards the abbey with her charge. She had been promoted to the office of nurse to the child, simply because Mrs. Pomeroy had become fascinated with her tales and her legends of the dead-and-gone Pomeroyes, belonging to the ages as dead-and-gone as they were. Bridget would recount to her marvellous legends of the Pomeroyes' grandeur and chivalry, varied with whispers of the Pomeroyes' less laudatory exploits. Mrs. Pomeroy took quite a liking for the woman, and she assigned to her the place of nurse to the child; herself being its nurse in one sense of the word.

Mrs. Pomeroy sat on, her parasol held over her right arm; that is, between her face and the sun. It was pleasant to recline there at her ease, enjoying the balm of the warm and tranquil air. A great bleak place the abbey looked, something like a prison; this west pile before her, having neither window nor outlet, nothing but its massive, unbroken, lichen-covered walls.

"Thank goodness, this solitude will be over to-morrow!" ejaculated Mrs. Pomeroy. "I can wear my new dresses, and there'll be people to see them. I'm sure I was quite well enough for company a fortnight and more ago, only Guy is so stupidly careful of me. How delightful it will be!"

Lost in this charming prospect—and to Mrs. Pomeroy, vain and frivolous, gaiety was always charming—she fell into a train of thought; from which she was aroused by the sound of footsteps behind her, hastening down the slope of the Keep. She turned her head, and—

What was it that dazzled her eyes, as if the glaring sun had suddenly flashed upon them? What was it that dazzled her mind to bewilderment? She rose up, little conscious what she did; her cheek flushed and paled, paled and flushed, her hands trembled, her heart grew sick and dizzy. Whose form was it, that caused all this emotion?

It was that of a noble-looking man, of the remarkable height, the well-turned limbs, the fine make of her own husband; indeed just for a moment she thought it was Guy, and wondered what brought him there. But no, it was not Guy: it was Rupert. Though much alike, Guy's countenance could not boast the remarkable beauty of this one, for Guy had his hare-lip, his stern look, and his unnaturally pale complexion. Yes, it was Rupert. Rupert whom she had not heard of, or seen, for two years.

Rupert Pomeroy drew a step back as she rose and turned her face to him: he had not observed her. She looked at him, not speaking, but she could not conceal the agitation which had taken possession of her whole frame: and he halted and stood before her. Alas! though she had resolutely thrust Rupert Pomeroy from her mind, and so believed she had thrust him from her heart, this sudden meeting served to show that the love had been only smouldering. She

covered her agitation with a look of scorn, for that was the chief feeling kept uppermost since she believed that he had wilfully played her false. Not less scornful, however, was the tone of Rupert.

"It is a surprise to me to meet the Lady of Pomeroy."

Again they stood gazing at each other, neither speaking. Mrs. Pomeroy remembered her position as the wife of his brother, and she struggled to maintain it as she ought.

"I believe I speak to Rupert Pomeroy?" she coldly said.

"Am I so changed that you need doubt it?" was his retort. "I should have thought, by the circumstances attending our last meeting, that you would only too well have remembered me. Have you forgotten that last meeting?"

She was thunderstruck at his audacity. "Do you know who I am?"

"To my cost I do know it. Guy's wife. But in that last meeting you swore to be mine. Alice," he continued, his voice trembling, "I trusted you from my very soul."

She could not comprehend; she advanced a step nearer to him. "Are you aiming to play off some deceit upon me again now, as you did then? To what end? You and I have nothing in common."

"Nothing?"

"Save hatred; contempt. They are what I feel for you."

He looked at her steadily, mockery in his eye and on his lip. She was excessively agitated; she could not understand his looks, his words. Instead of sinking to the earth with shame for his treachery, he appeared to throw blame and scorn on her.

"You are my husband's brother," she resumed, "and I will say to you what I would not stoop to say were I any other man's wife. Though it may be that you are utterly callous, impervious to reproach. You came in secret to my mother's home to win my love——"

"And I thought I did win it."

"How dared you so come to befool me," she continued in agitation, waiving away his interruption, "dastardly pretending that your love was mine?"

"Dastardly!" retorted Rupert, his eye flashing; "I am a Pomeroy. Was it more dastardly in one brother to seek you, than in the other. What, though Guy was the heir?—had you wanted position and riches, why did you not say so?"

"I did not want them. You know I did not."

"You married them, at any rate, madam," he slightly returned.

"And you made pretty good haste to do so."

"This show of recrimination will not serve your purpose," resumed Mrs. Pomeroy. "I would like an answer before I have done with the subject for ever. Once more I ask for an explanation, and if you have a grain of honour you will give it—why you came, dastardly deceiving me with your false vows?"

"If you had aught about you as true as they were, you would do,

Lady of Pomeroy. Whatever other ill I may have done, I loved you faithfully: as I have never loved and never shall love another."

"You may spare yourself the avowal, Rupert Pomeroy: to what end, I ask, lie about it now? I know who it was you did love—while you pretended to love and visit me. But I am ashamed of myself for thus alluding to anything so disgraceful."

"As you have alluded to it you had better explain, madam. I do not know what you are speaking of. On my word of honour."

In Rupert's generally gay eyes there sat so earnest an expression that Mrs. Pomeroy felt staggered. Did he in truth not understand?

She dropped her voice. "Have you forgotten that unhappy person who—who——"

"Pray proceed."

"Whom you took away with you?"

Rupert looked at her. "What person?"

"I know all about it.—I blush for myself that I should deign to allude to it again—but I wish you to understand that, though you succeeded in deceiving me for a space of time, the enlightenment came. Therefore we shall stand on equal ground for the future."

"I ask what person," he steadily repeated. "What do you mean?"

"Sybilla Gaunt," replied Mrs. Pomeroy, in a whisper.

After a stare of surprise, Rupert burst into laughter. Mrs. Pomeroy turned indignantly away.

He strode after her, and caught her by the arm. "Do you mean what you say, Mrs. Pomeroy? Is it possible that you suspect *me* of having abducted Sybilla Gaunt?"

"I do not suspect. I know it was you."

Her contemptuous manner had been telling upon him. "Then hear me," he said, almost as passionately as his brother Guy could have spoken. "I never had an ill thought towards Sybilla, I never had a grain of love for her; I swear it. You are entirely mistaken."

There was truth in his eye and in his tone. Mrs. Pomeroy turned ghastly pale. "Surely you knew that she fell into trouble?"

"I knew that. I suppose you ladies call it trouble."

Mrs. Pomeroy frowned. But she was in a very tumult of agitation, comprehending nothing, as it seemed, and could but pursue her questions.

"Did you know who was the author of it?"

"I did."

"Tell me, and I will believe all you say."

Rupert hesitated. "As to believing me, you must do as you please. If I ever spoke a word of truth in my life, I am speaking it now."

"Yes, yes, I do believe you. But you should not leave it in this uncertainty; you *must* tell me. Who was it?"

Still Rupert hesitated. "There exists a reason why it should not be known at Abbeyland. If I do tell you will you undertake to keep it secret?"

"I will."

"It was my brother George. Captain Pomeroy."

"Captain Pomeroy," she repeated below her breath. "Did he —"

"Ask me no questions," interrupted Rupert. "I can tell you nothing but the bare fact that George was the culprit. Who was it that put you on the wrong scent?"

"Guy."

"Guy! Then I shall have a score to settle with him."

"He believed it was you. The village believed it."

"Guy did not believe it—whatever the village may have done. The village laid many a peccadillo on my back, being a broad one, that had no legal right there. What did I care? it made me none the sadder."

"Guy did not?" dreamily repeated Mrs. Pomeroy.

"Guy knew better. He knew as much as I did."

"Joan thought it," she continued. "My mother thought it."

"Very likely. I have a broad back, I say, and always have had one. Was this the reason that you broke your vows to me?"

"Yes," she answered, her pale lips quivering. "Guy came to me again one day, pressing me to be his wife: to get rid of his importunity I confided to him that I loved you, that I had promised to wait and be yours, and then he ridiculed my credulity, and told me you were the cause of all that had happened to Sybilla Gaunt. He said that Sybilla had followed you."

Rupert turned from her to give a few strong words to his brother. "And then you married him?"

"And then I married him. I was mad, Rupert: I did not care what became of me. He has played us both false."

"He has played us both false," echoed Rupert, "false as his own false nature. And yet I never knew it was false until now; for, with all his sternness, I took Guy to be the soul of honour. Let him look to himself!"

"But, Rupert, you never came, you never wrote," she pleaded, the tears running down her cheeks. "Why did you stay away in London all that while? What was I to think?"

Rupert coughed: conscience told him that he could clear himself less easily on this score than the other. But the best of us have excuses at hand.

"I stayed there hunting after that Government post which I expected. And, later, I got put into the Queen's Bench Prison: that must have been not long before your marriage. Do you know who put me there? Guy."

"Guy!"

"He did. In so far as that he would not advance a poor, small, pitiful sum, just a few hundreds, to keep me out of it. He wrote word to our lawyer that a little spell at the Queen's Bench would do me good."

"Oh, Rupert! It has been a black plot of treachery against us both."

"It has; and it succeeded. He won you by a lie! Let him look to himself."

Rupert spoke in a pointed manner. Mrs. Pomeroy had little doubt what it was he alluded to, and she shuddered as with a sudden fear. That wild prediction, bearing dread portent for the Lords of Pomeroy, and implicitly believed in—when one of them should win a wife by means of a lie—recurred to her.

Rupert Pomeroy touched with his forefinger Mrs. Pomeroy's shoulder. "You love me still," he dared to say. "Nay, no denial. I see it."

"From my whole heart," she answered, for indignation was strong within her; and she had begun to hate her treacherous husband with a deadly hatred.

Oh, foolish woman! Ill-trained, ill-regulated, devoid of conscience, though she surely must be, how could she make so dangerous and wicked an avowal? The next moment she repented of it herself, the little grace within her was making itself heard; and some shame was in her face as she said a hasty farewell to Rupert.

"Won by a lie," she muttered to herself, "won by a lie!"

Rupert told the truth. George Pomeroy was the culprit, not himself, and he had been in George's confidence throughout: had done his best to aid in keeping the affair a secret from John Gaunt.

This same morning, two or three hours before, as Gaunt sat at his early breakfast, Rupert Pomeroy had walked in. "Will you give me house-room, Gaunt, for a few days?" he asked, after greetings had passed.

"With pleasure; you know that, Mr. Rupert," was the warm answer of the unsuspecting keeper, with whom Rupert was a favourite. "But what has the abbey done to you?"

"The abbey! do you think I would trouble that?" returned Rupert. "Not after Guy's unbrotherly conduct to me."

"What has he done?"

"He has let me languish in prison for I don't know how long, when three or four hundreds at first would have saved me from it. Yes, Guy might have saved me when I was first arrested, and I'd have taken pretty good care they did not catch me again. Once put in there, and the fact known, all the liabilities I possessed came down upon me together. It was rather a jolly time, though, in there, taking one thing with another."

"And how is it that you have managed to escape now?"

"Whitewashed," briefly rejoined Rupert: and Gaunt drew in his

lips with an expression of pain. "Yes, of course, it is very degrading for a Pomeroy," Rupert added, noting the look; "but no one came to my aid, and I could not languish there for life. Guy will about die of it, I expect. Rare fun if he does."

Gaunt took the valise from Rupert's hand, and conducted him to the little spare chamber that was so rarely occupied.

The Lord of Pomeroy's business that day at Owlstone was to take the chair at a county meeting, involving some question connected with religion. Guy, energetic upon the point, warm and earnest in supporting his own faith, stayed to discuss the matter with some friends after the prolonged meeting was over, and got home late. Alice was at dinner; she had not chosen to wait. Guy ran up to his dressing-room for a minute, and then sat down.

Whilst eating his dinner he told her about the meeting: what was said at it, what done. But that he was so completely absorbed in the topic himself, he might have noted that his wife listened with callous indifference, scarcely deigning to make any reply.

In point of fact, Mrs. Pomeroy was boiling over with wrath, burning to "have it out" with Guy. She fully meant never to forgive her husband what he had done; never: she waited to tell him of the meeting with Rupert, and all she had learnt at it. But the servants were present, and she had to condemn herself to silence.

As the attendants quitted the room, leaving the dessert and wine on the table, Guy drew forth a packet of letters—three or four, tied together—from his pocket. Owlstone had two posts a day; Abbeyland but one; therefore, when any of the abbey people were at Owlstone in the afternoon, they called at the post-office to see if any letters lay there. As Guy had done to-day; and found these.

He proceeded to open them. For Alice this was another delay: he was always so absorbed in his letters, and she wanted his undivided attention. But the waiting was trying her; the tension of her nerves became well-nigh unbearable. Her breath was beginning to grow short; her throat to beat: she laid her hand upon her neck to still it.

"Great heavens!"

The exclamation came from Guy: and it startled her. Startled her because he, the usually calm man, was so powerfully agitated. A dark flash of anger sat on his face, his eyes glared, he groaned in pain. The letter in his hand was in Mr. Hildyard's writing, their London solicitor; Alice could see that much. Surely it had brought some terrible news!

"He must have been mad!" groaned Guy. "The degenerate hound!—to have wrought this shameful disgrace upon our name!"

"Mr. Hildyard has?" questioned Alice, surprised into asking the question, her own grievances giving momentary place to her curiosity.

"Not Hildyard. That wicked brother of mine—Rupert."

The truth was, Mr. Hildyard, deeming himself compelled to acquaint the head of the family with the crisis which had taken place in the fortunes (or misfortunes) of one of its members, had tardily sat down the previous evening to accomplish it. And the letter on which Guy's eyes were strained conveyed the same tidings which Rupert had himself so unceremoniously spoken in a single word to Gaunt—that he had been “whitewashed.” Perhaps hardly any other word or deed could have struck so humiliating a sound upon the haughty Lord of Pomeroy.

“He is worse than a serpent!” he raved: and Alice felt daunted as she saw his threatening face. “He is worse than ——”

“Mr. Rupert Pomeroy.”

It was Jerome who threw wide the door and announced him. Rupert came forward. Guy gazed at him as though he were an apparition.

“I had thought you would be alone,” spoke Rupert lightly, addressing Guy. “You must have dined late.”

The easy manner, the insolent words—insolent in Guy's ear—only added fuel to fire. Dark reproach sat on his face, bitter scorn on his tongue. Rupert recriminated on his own score: and Mrs. Pomeroy, who stood her ground, and at first was too terrified to do more than stand it in a remote corner, at length joined in.

What passed, none, apart from themselves, ever knew, but the storm terrified those of the servants who heard it. Jerome, nearly out of his senses, stayed in the ante-room: perhaps to keep others away. They gathered in the corridors and on the stairs. It ended by the Lord of Pomeroy's dashing open the door and ordering the servants to thrust his brother forth. They would have done it; they dared not disobey the lord when he had that temper upon him, or indeed at any other time, but Rupert walked forth of his own accord. Exaggerated tales of the interview went forth to the village.

Mrs. Pomeroy passed swiftly out of the dining-room in the wake of Rupert, and went to her child in the nursery. It was wailing a low wail of complaint or of pain. Mrs. Pomeroy took it, but it would not be soothed; there was still the same low wail; not a cry.

“I cannot think what's the matter with her,” exclaimed Bridget. “She has never cried like this: when she does cry, it is like all other children, loud enough for half the abbey to hear, but not this strange pining wail.”

No; Mrs. Pomeroy might try her best: the infant would not be tranquillised. Was it wailing for the distress coming on its home?

Tired at length with her efforts to soothe it, for a little thing soon tired Mrs. Pomeroy, she gave it back to Bridget, went to her room, and rang for her maid. Theresa appeared nearly in a state of collapse: she feared that her lady must have had something to do with the cause of the quarrel that had so alarmed them all.

"Which bed-chambers have been prepared for the guests to-morrow?"

"All that were available, I think, madam," was the reply of Theresa. "All on this floor; and some of those above-stairs."

"Is the small room at the side of the north corridor, next to the blue room, ready?"

"Yes, madam, I know it is, for I helped to take the linen to the different rooms, and that was one."

"Carry my things there."

She had gradually (impressed, no doubt, with her own exalted dignity as Lady of Pomeroy) been getting into a habit of speaking imperiously to her servants, even to Theresa, therefore this curtness was no new thing. But the woman doubted in what sense to take the words.

"Remove all my things to that room, I say," repeated Mrs. Pomeroy. "Now. Call some one to help you. It will be mine from henceforth, instead of this."

Theresa was surprised. "And the lord's things also?" she asked.

"Mine, I said," was the sharp retort of Mrs. Pomeroy.

She went outside, passed into one of the transverse corridors, and stood at its end window, apparently gazing into the court-yard. In reality she was gazing within her, at her own outraged heart. Rupert's offence in "whitewashing" himself might be very humiliating, but what was that to her?—all her compassion was spent upon herself—all her bitter rage was given to Guy for the false trick he had played her. Her hands were clasped until the nails pressed her sharply: but what cared she then for bodily pain.

A short while, and she turned to make her way to the dining-room, where she had left her husband. He was not there. She found him in the saloon where they generally sat after dinner; that gorgeously-fitted-up room which Guy had made all gilding and beauty for her: a contrast to their own dark spirits just now. The mirrors reflected their countenances, and Mrs. Pomeroy's was a scowling one; but she had made a compact with herself to be cool and contemptuous, rather than fierce. They had had enough of fierceness for one evening.

Guy sat in one of her dainty chairs, calm, save that his eye was restless. His wife went up and stood in front of him: she placed her hands before her, one over the other, as a school-girl does when repeating a lesson to her governess, and began in a measured tone, steadily looking at him.

"Why did you bring this misery upon us?"

His grey eye flashed. "I have brought no misery. You will bring it upon yourself, if you behave as you behaved to-night."

"You have brought a misery upon us that will never end but with our lives. It never shall end."

"Speak for yourself," he rejoined.

"I do; but I also speak for you, Lord of Pomeroy. You shall go your way, and I will go mine: we are strangers from this hour."

"Perhaps you would like to go your way with Rupert," retorted the lord: speaking, though, in the plenitude of his security that such a catastrophe could no more take place than that the stars could shine at noonday. She and Rupert had both provoked him that evening unjustifiably by their incautious reproaches to him.

"No," she replied, catching up her breath with a gasp, and her face turning to crimson, "you have barred that for ever."

His lips parted, she thought to laugh, and closed again. She was mistaken there; nothing could be much further from Guy Pomeroy's heart and lips that night than laughter. Alice resumed.

"Why did you do so? Why did you come to me with that wicked tale—knowing it was false?"

"I had two motives," he coolly replied. "One was, that I loved you; I was dying for you: the other was, that I would save you from him. Allow that he was not in that one particular case, other cases could have been told you against him. Had you been suffered to marry him, he would have toyed with your heart for a month, and then broken it."

"I was dying for Rupert," she returned, in a low tone, whose passion was kept down, while the large tear-drops of regret filled her eyes. "Far rather would I have been his wife for a month, though my heart had then broken, than yours to eternity."

He suppressed his just indignation. No one, save himself, knew what it cost him to do it, or how bitterly she was trying him. "You shall not repeat such language to me, Alice; it is a shame for you to utter it."

"You have heard it before," was the agitated reply. "I told you, in the very hour that you came forth to win me with your falsehood, that I loved your brother with an all-enduring love: I told you I should never love you. You have not forgotten."

No, that he had not. Often enough had he winced at the remembrance of the words.

"On the day before our wedding a thought occurred—it must have been some good spirit sent it to me—what if you were deceiving me? and I put the question deliberately to you," she continued. "Do you remember your answer? I prayed you to tell me true; I said that should it ever come to light, later, that you were so deceiving me, it would be bad for both of us. It has now come."

Guy rose from his chair. "Let us have done with this, Alice," he said, in a tone of conciliation.

"Done with it?" she repeated. "Yes, presently, when I have finished: but its effects will never be done with. Guy Pomeroy, I will no longer be your wife: never again; never, never!"

He smiled. "Yes, you will."

"Never again," she murmured. "I would not do so wickedly:

for my whole love is Rupert's. I thought that love was conquered ; I did, indeed ; but the sight of him has shown me my mistake. The fact is, since I became your wife I have striven to keep it under ; been suppressing his image in my mind ; I would not suffer it to rise, I would not dwell upon it. Henceforward I shall cherish it and live upon it ; so you see how impossible it is that I can stay here to be your wife."

Guy's lips were turning livid. "Have you any sense of shame left?" he asked. And he did not speak without cause: for truly she could possess little, thus to boldly beard her husband.

"You may get a separation ; a divorce ; anything you please," she continued. "The sooner the better. And then you may bring home another to be the Lady of Pomeroy."

He caught her by the arm.

"You cannot beat me," she said. "The chivalrous Lords of Pomeroy do not beat women."

"You will tempt me to it, Alice, if you drive me to desperation," returned Guy ; who, considering his fiery nature, was keeping his temper marvellously well. "Hold your peace, lady."

"When I have said what I wish to say. At present, until these people who are expected shall have come and gone, there must be an appearance of amity between us : after that, I shall consider what to do: probably go home to my mother. But while these gossiping crowds are here, let us play a part: all smiling suavity when before them ; strangers when not."

"You pretty little schemer!" he laughed, a shade of contempt in his tone. "The Lords of Pomeroy don't part with their wives thus easily ; although you seem so willing to resign your baby."

She looked up with a startled glance. "I should take my baby with me."

"Oh dear no," replied the Lord of Pomeroy. "If you leave my home upon a whim, you do not take my child."

"The law would give it me."

"Alice, it would *not*." And Guy was right.

"Do you know," she whispered, struggling to maintain her calmness, "that you are tempting me to hate you with a double hatred. You have brought woe upon me for ever. I feel as a caged bird, barred in from love and from life ; barred by you. I disliked you, Guy, before we married. I hate you now."

"You are bold, my lady."

"But for my own good name, and that the child may grow up to call me mother, I would have quitted your roof this night ; ay, though the step had flung me into the arms of Rupert. There was a demon tempting me—had it been only to take my revenge on you."

"If you do not cease, I will have you confined as a madwoman," cried Guy. "Surely you must be mad, to inflict upon yourself this humiliation !"

"I have nearly said my say. To-morrow, before my guests, you will find me all smiles and polite speeches again. My things are being removed to the small room in the north wing, and that will be mine as long as I remain at the abbey."

He leaned towards her, hissing rather than speaking: the haughty Pomeroy temper was being stung cruelly by these insults. "If you attempt to leave your own apartments, I will bar you up in them—and come and attend you as your keeper. You *are* mad, Alice."

"You won me by a lie," she returned, greatly agitated; "and, now that I know it, I am not bound to obey you. If a thief should steal a shilling, though he may get it into his possession, it is not legally or morally his. Did you forget the prediction?—the woe it threatens?"

Guy retorted with scorn. "Prediction? Threatened woe? Tush!—unless you choose to mar the peace of the house and bring it."

"There was to be great woe when that picture was destroyed," she said, catching up her breath.

"Always remember one thing, Alice—that you visited the west wing and the picture in direct disobedience to me. But for that, the picture would not have been destroyed. I must try to teach my wife better manners. But I wish to do it in all kindness. You will order your things back to your own room."

"I will not," she steadily answered. "If you attempt to force me to it, I will go this night to my mother. Pretty scandal for the Lord of Pomeroy, when the guests shall arrive to-morrow and find his lady flown!"

Alice called him right; the Lord of Pomeroy: he was both lord and master. She went to the room that had been hers; Guy followed and closed the door. Bridget, who was near, was startled by the sounds that came from the room: recriminating words from both, though she could not hear their purport; very decisive and haughty ones from the lord, sobs and wails from her mistress. Sudden silence supervened. Bridget felt terrified, she hardly knew of what, went to the door with an excuse, and knocked at it.

It was opened instantly by the lord: he appeared to have been standing near it, and her mistress sat by the table. Bridget could not see her face distinctly, for the room was only lighted by the large lamp, which hung outside in the court-yard.

"Did you call me, madam?" she hastened to say. "I thought you might want the baby, but she's asleep now."

"No one called," replied the lord. "Bridget."

"Sir."

"Some orders of your mistress's have been misapprehended—her things have been carried to the north corridor. Speak to Theresa and have them brought back."

The things were carried back. Mrs. Pomeroy did not gainsay it;

and the servants whispered. Oppose the iron will of Guy Pomeroy? his wife need not have thought it.

When rest and silence fell upon the abbey, there appeared to be rest and silence in the lady's chamber; but had one been curious enough to listen, they might have heard the monotonous step of the lord, pacing it through the better part of the night.

It is an act of madness to pour spirits on a raging fire; little less so to control by angry force the fierce will of an indignant woman. That Mrs. Pomeroy had not a well-regulated mind has been previously observed, lest the reader did not see it for himself: though perhaps none, even of those who had been about her from childhood, suspected *how* ill-regulated it might become in a season of temptation. The steps taken by Guy—in this the first moment of her renewed fancy for Rupert and rage against himself—were not judicious ones. Far better that he had let her go to the lonely room, and suffered her indignation to spend itself there for a short while, a few days, and then have tried conciliation. It might have answered—after a little holding out; for a woman, look you, talk as she may, will think twice before she actually goes the length of quitting her husband's home, or of in any way separating herself from him. As it was, Madam Alice Pomeroy was nursing all kinds of reprisals in her revengeful heart.

## CHAPTER XI.

### FOLLY.

In the state dining-room below, never used but on occasions of extremely ceremonious or large dinners, sat the Lord and the Lady of Pomeroy, entertaining their guests. A fine sight: a goodly company. The dishes of silver-gilt, bearing their costly viands, crowded the board. The dinner à-la-Russe fashion had not come in then; and the more prodigal the feast displayed on the table, the greater honour was accounted to be rendered to the guests.

The wax-lighted chandeliers hung from the ceiling; the sideboard shone with its array of glass and plate. Numerous servants in their liveries of purple velvet and silver, waited about, headed by Jerome in plain attire, who stood behind his lord, and never served anybody but him. At the left hand of Mrs. Pomeroy sat Father Andrew; towards the middle of the table sat Mrs. Wylde. The priest was all merry good nature; it did one good to look at his rubicund face, he could hardly control it to solemnity while he said grace; Mrs. Wylde was gorgeous as dress could make her, but otherwise not much to be noticed: and as these two are all we know among the guests, the others need not be mentioned.

It was a grand old room; and was supposed to have been the chapel in by-gone days, before the other chapel was built. The mahogany panelings were in small divisions, and richly carved, each one

having been formerly a monk's stall. Three high windows of painted glass, representing scenes in the times of the crusaders, looked towards the quadrangle. They gave the only light the room had, consequently it was dark by day: but emblazoned, as now, with its many wax lights, that fault could not at present be charged upon it. On these state occasions the painted windows were lighted up by means of lamps placed behind them outside; and they formed not the least of the room's attractions, particularly for those who had the luck to sit on the side facing them, and so could look at them at will during the whole time of the banquet.

Who so gay as Mrs. Pomeroy, heading her table in her white robes of silk and lace, her favourite attire; who so calm, so equable, so courteous as her lord, facing her at the end of the long table? Of all the toilettes present, not one was more beautiful than hers; of all the faces, not one was so lovely. Upon her white neck, her arms, nestling amid her hair, glittered the diamonds handed to her by Guy on their wedding day; upon her cheeks shone the damask flush of excitement. This set of diamonds, and they were of rare beauty, belonged to the reigning Lady of Pomeroy, and to her alone; did she cease to reign, they went from her. If Guy died to-morrow, and Rupert succeeded, Mrs. Pomeroy could no longer wear or claim the diamonds. Had her child been a boy, she would have reigned Lady of Pomeroy until that boy should in his turn bring a wife home to replace her, and could have worn the Pomeroy diamonds until then.

Dear, most dear, was this show and state to Mrs. Pomeroy. Her heart was conscious of that. It was also conscious, for a little latent voice kept rising within it to that effect, that if she quitted the abbey, this show and state would, for her, be for ever over: it was only as the Lord of Pomeroy's wife that she could enjoy it. The homage rendered to her was but rendered in right of Guy: separate herself from him, and she might sink back to the obscurity from which she came; obscurity compared with the position she revelled in now. Mrs. Wylde was rich, but her riches would not gather about her an assemblage such as this: the guests of rank, second only to princes; or the plate emblazoned with the Lord of Pomeroy's arms, come down from generation to generation; or the time-worn, sumptuously-clad retainers, who looked as if they could never belong to any but an ancient family. Yes; Alice Pomeroy had been raised to this height, and she would certainly think twice before she wilfully forfeited it.

Ever and anon as she sat there, came a thought into her mind, "I should not like to leave it; I must do nothing rashly." Until this evening, which was the day of the guests' arrival, and the evening following the scene with Guy, she had been keeping up the ball of indignation with her own heart; had been feeding her enmity to her husband, had been saying to herself, "I will not stay with him." But now, with all this glitter and glamour before her, she did not feel so sure about it. Not a single word had they spoken to one another

since the unseemly recrimination ; she in her resentment would not speak ; Guy deemed it best to humour her mood and allow her a little time to come to her senses. Amidst the guests were some who had never seen her ; and Guy had performed the introduction with the most perfect suavity, " My wife, the Lady of Pomeroy." For all anybody had seen, they were upon the pleasant terms that man and wife should be ; she was lively, laughing, gay ; he, courteous and attentive to all to the last degree. Ever and anon, as they sat opposite to each other now, she caught Guy's eyes fixed upon her—and turned away her own at once in resentment. He was the finest looking man in the room, towering above them all ; some little warmth sat in his usually pallid face ; and though the unfortunate upper lip was undeniably ugly, the well-carved Pomeroy features, and the dark-grey eyes were beautiful.

The lord had begun by entertaining his guests right regally, as a Pomeroy loved to do ; he would so continue to entertain them until the fortnight for which they were invited came to an end. Excursions abroad, evening festivities at home, occasionally varied with men's out-of-door sports. The grandest fête of all would be that of the christening : for which Miss Pomeroy, who was to be one of the godmothers, would arrive. And so, we leave them at the dinner-table.

The next morning the gentlemen went out shooting, Guy giving orders for luncheon to be sent to them. Some of the ladies proposed a drive to Owlstone, and carriages were ordered round. Towards mid-day, Alice, making her baby an excuse for absenting herself from the rest of her guests, left her mother to entertain them, put on her bonnet, and walked out. It was a most lovely day. October had brought in a true *été de St. Michel*, and this was the third of the month.

Yes, she walked out deliberately, knowing that she ran the hazard of meeting Rupert Pomeroy : though indeed he might already have left Abbeyland. In later years, when she was bearing the burden of a life-long repentance, she would tell herself again and again that she did not seek to meet him ; that she would not have gone out purposely to do it. Most certainly she had no wrong thought in her heart ; let us give her that due ; she did not forget that she was his brother's wife.

Winding round to the south of the abbey, her beautiful morning dress of a delicate lilac colour trailing on the hot grass, she came upon Rupert. He was standing by the Keep, just in the same spot where they had met two days before. Rupert raised his hat and held out his hand ; the colour rushed vividly into her face as she put out her own hand to answer it.

" Taking a walk, Mrs. Pomeroy ? You are lucky to get time for it, with that house full of people."

" Most of them are out," she answered, " and mamma is there. Oh, Rupert ! I—I must tell you ! We had such a dreadful scene."

"Who had? When?"

"I and Guy. After you left."

And then, most imprudently and inexcusably, Mrs. Pomeroy began to give Rupert the history of what had passed between herself and Guy. She was yearning for sympathy, and she had no one else to tell it to; and the sight and presence of Rupert, whom she still so passionately loved—though it is a humiliation even to record it—called up again all her resentment, her ill-feeling towards Guy. One word, one avowal led to another, Alice did not spare her husband; all the bitter things her tongue could say were heaped upon him. The fact of Rupert being his brother justified this in her own mind; to any other man she, with all her incaution, would not have been so imprudent. And Rupert, far from repressing, met her half way, for had he not grievances on his own score to settle with Guy, and abused him to her heart's content. Thus, in close conversation, now one speaking, and now the other, and pacing slowly round and round the Keep, they, chancing to lift their heads, saw a company of sportsmen at a great distance.

"Oh, Rupert, Guy is with them!" she suddenly exclaimed, "and they are coming this way! It will make him more angry than ever to see me talking with you."

Without a word, Rupert touched one of her hands and drew her to a small low door in the wall at the back of the Keep; it flew open, and admitted them inside.

"You are safe here until they have passed," he whispered.

"But how did you get the door open?" she asked in wonder. "I always understood that little door could not be opened from the outside."

"Neither can it be, except by me and the lord. Yes, Jerome knows the secret; I forgot him. There is an invisible spring."

"The lord!" she uttered, in breathless agitation. "Suppose he should take it in his head to enter now?"

Rupert smiled, drew a strong iron bar across the door and secured it. "Not a dozen lords combined could enter now."

"Suppose he were to come in by the front door?"

"My dear Alice, what should bring him with the key of the Keep? I don't suppose it has been taken from Jerome's key-closet for years."

But Mrs. Pomeroy held her breath and trembled; conscience and fear were making a coward of her. And rightly—she had no business to conceal herself. That was the first false step.

She took another within the next five minutes. She and Rupert stood, straining their ears to listen for the voices and footsteps of the sportsmen, but the walls were thick, for the door had admitted them to a room inside the Keep, not to any court or yard without it. "They must have passed by this time," said Rupert, at length; "I will go up and see. Would you like to look over the old Keep, Alice?"

"Oh dear no," she hastily replied. "I am only anxious to get out of it; I tremble lest any untoward miracle should bring Guy in."

Rupert laughed. Ascending the narrow stairs he made his way to the front of the building, and peeped out at one of the quaint loopholes of windows. Yes; the sportsmen had come that way. "They are right down in the dell now, half way to the abbey," he said, returning. "All is safe."

"Oh, thank goodness! Open the door for me."

"As soon as they shall be out of sight. You may finish what you were telling me here, as well as outside. There is no such hurry."

"I dare not, Rupert," she said. "See how I am shaking. I shall make haste to the abbey, before he can find that I am out. They must be coming back to lunch, although he ordered it taken to them."

"I don't see that you need be so afraid of him."

"But I am. It is his turn, just while these people and mamma are with us; she takes his part in everything—and he nearly frightened me to death that night. But my time will come."

"Has Mrs. Wylde been told, then?"

"No. But I know how she would take it, if she were. I am sure they must be out of sight now."

Rupert undid the door and they passed outside together; he closing it again after him.

"We cannot part for good like this, Alice, with your tale half told," he said. For what with her elaboration in the recital, and the interruption on both sides to abuse Guy, the history was not at an end. "Meet me here to-morrow and finish it; I may be far away the next day."

"Oh, Rupert, I am afraid."

"If you mean afraid of me, you are more foolish than I could have thought you," he rejoined. "You were not afraid to meet me once, and I did not attempt to harm you: I should certainly not be likely to attempt to now. If you mean afraid of Guy, he cannot see you, inside here. I will have the door open at this hour, and be waiting for you."

"I have no one in the world to tell my anger and grief to but you, Rupert, and if I cannot tell them to somebody they will break my heart," cried the weak woman.

"Of course they will," laughed Rupert, gaily; attaching as much importance to the silly words as they deserved.

"If I thought it would not be wrong to come!"

"Where would the wrong lie?"

"After all, Guy is your brother."

"He is, and you are his wife. I am not likely to forget it."

"Of course, you would not forget it: neither do I. Then I will come, Rupert."

False step the second—and a very false one.

"Why, where have you been?" cried Mrs. Wylde, chancing to VOL. XXV.

meet Alice in the corridor as she stole in. At least her soft steps, and the gown held up to prevent the sound of its rustle, looked like stealing in.

"My head ached, mamma; I went out for a little stroll," briefly responded Alice, making the best of her way onwards.

"Oh, and Alice, the gentlemen have come back to luncheon," Mrs. Wylde called out after her. "The birds were shy, and they got tired."

"Nice sportsmen!" muttered Alice, with a toss of the head.

Mrs. Pomeroy did not forget on the following day the appointment she had made with Rupert; be you very sure of that. Deep in her heart there sat a latent consciousness that she might be acting unwisely; but she was cherishing the revengeful feeling towards her husband with the most inveterate obstinacy. Had all the saints in the chapel warned her not to meet Rupert, she would not have listened to them.

Leaving her visitors to occupy themselves as they best might, or to be entertained by her mother, Mrs. Pomeroy went forth to the meeting, just as the little chapel clock was ringing out its twelve strokes for mid-day. Guy was away again, the sportsmen having gone to-day to a greater distance. She found Rupert waiting for her at the little door of the Keep, which stood open.

"Good morning," said he. "I began to think you were not coming."

"It is only twelve o'clock."

"Only twelve! I have been here these twenty minutes. And you know the old Spanish proverb."

"No I don't. What is it?"

"To expect one who does not come; to lie in bed and not to sleep; to serve and not to be advanced, are three things enough to kill a man.' I don't say they would kill me, but I never was famous for patience. Will you come in?"

"No; I am not going inside to-day. We can walk about while I finish the history of what Guy said and did; and then I must go back again."

"As you will," replied Rupert. And he was turning to shut the Keep door, when, somewhat to his surprise, Alice whisked swiftly past him and went inside of her own accord.

"There's Father Andrew," she whispered.

Rupert looked round. The priest had come out of the chapel, and was halting at its entrance, as if uncertain whether to bend his steps this way or round to his own house beyond the grave-yard. Rupert followed Mrs. Pomeroy, and shut the door.

"I'm sure you need not be afraid of the priest," said he. "What though he did see me walking with you? Is it treason?"

"He might tell Guy," said Mrs. Pomeroy.

"And what if he did! There's no harm. Guy would not eat you for it."

"He might—shake me. I declare, Rupert, I thought that night, more than once, that he would have shaken me."

"How you must have provoked him!" laughed Rupert.

"I did. I said everything I could to do it. He was so mad!"

Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coute, you know. Once inside the Keep, Mrs. Pomeroy seemed reconciled to the situation, and made no move to go out again. In truth, she was afraid of being seen. Other eyes might be about, as well as Father Andrew's. She knew well enough that she ought not to be with Rupert while he and Guy were at variance; it was like "going over to the enemy;" least of all, meet him clandestinely. He was her husband's brother, and, as such, on the face of things it seemed that there could be no harm in it; but, remembering the terms on which Guy and Rupert were, and her own former love for Rupert, even the elastic conscience of Alice Pomeroy warned her that it was what she ought not to do. As to Rupert, his conscience was elastic at all times, but he had the high, honourable instincts of a Pomeroy in all that related to the Pomeroyes, and most assuredly he would not have wronged a brother. Neither would he have willingly brought Guy's wife under his censure, bitterly though he was feeling towards himself. It was very pleasant indeed to meet Alice, and join her in abusing Guy.

Rupert perched himself upon a high stone ledge projecting from the wall; Mrs. Pomeroy sat on the opposite side of the room on a low stool creaky with age: and there they talked away at Guy to their anger's content; but it was all highly wrong and foolish, and she, at any rate, ought to have known better.

"I told him I would quit the abbey as soon as these people went, Rupert," she observed, after bringing her narrative of the quarrel between herself and Guy to a conclusion. "And I think I shall."

"Quit the abbey?" questioned Rupert, not knowing in what sense to take the words. "How do you mean?"

"Quit it for good. Quit *him*."

"That *would* be wise!" returned Rupert, in a tone that proved he thought the contrary.

"But there's the baby, you see," debated Alice, as she leaned forward, her elbow on her knee, her chin on her hand. "I am afraid he'd keep it. He said he would. He said the law would give it him."

"I daresay it would. Do you want my opinion?"

"If you will give it," she answered with a half sob.

"That you could not take a more unwise step. It is one you would probably repent of all your life. Having adopted the abbey for your home, there's nothing for it, that I see, but to stay in it."

"I like it for some things," confessed Alice, thinking of the show and the splendour. "But I don't like Guy."

"You should have thought of that before. It's too late now."

"Will you, please, look at your watch?" cried Alice, thinking he was not very complimentary this morning.

It was half-past twelve. Rupert jumped off his perch, and Alice rose. In walking towards the door, a thought struck her.

"You have not told me where you are staying, Rupert?"

"At Gaunt's."

"At Gaunt's! Oh, then you are friendly with him!"

"Why should we not be friendly?"

"Well—I thought—about Captain Pomeroy, you know."

Just for the moment Rupert, who had his hand on the spring of the door and his face turned back towards her, did not seem to catch her meaning. "About Sybilla," she added.

"It would be hard if the sins of one brother were to be visited on the other," answered Rupert, a smile crossing his lips. "Even if Gaunt were aware that George had injured him—which he is not."

"I have fancied that. Where is Sybilla now?"

"I do not know anything about the matter," interrupted Rupert, in a tone that admitted of no appeal. "My own peccadilloes are enough for me to carry, without troubling myself about those of my brothers. We Pomeroyes do not interfere with one another. The best thing you can do, Alice, is to forget Sybilla Gaunt. Above all, remember—remember always—that I have confided George's name to you in strict confidence, as regards this affair. Never let it escape your lips."

"You may trust me. Will you look out and see that the coast is clear?"

The coast was clear. It was a spot rarely frequented, and not a soul was in sight. For a few minutes they paced about underneath the Keep: and when they parted, another appointment was made for the morrow. Rupert avowed that he was not going away from Abbeyland just yet: he had formed no plans, and might as well stay a few days, as not.

And so, as the days went on, Mrs. Pomeroy suffered herself to fall into the habit of meeting Rupert: and the habit, considering his reckless character and the temper she was at present indulging, was not altogether a safe one. All the old love was revived in the heart of each; and that was not altogether safe. Neither of them had any ill intention, not a thought of wrong: had danger been mentioned to them, each would alike have scorned the suggestion.

Not every day, but as often as she could safely accomplish it, did Mrs. Pomeroy go forth to meet Rupert in the Keep. There was no more reason for their seeking the shelter of the Keep than for being in the open air, only that within it they were safe from remark. No doubt it wore a bad appearance, these secret meetings in that private place; that is, it would have worn such had there been eyes to observe. But they would have seen nothing worse than Rupert perched on his stone ledge, and Alice on the low stool by the opposite wall, both talking away eagerly, the theme generally being the treachery of the lord. That was all; but, as above remarked, it was altogether highly hazardous and objectionable.

The guests had been at Pomeroy Abbey ten days, three-parts the length of term they were invited for, when the day of the christening dawned. It brought a disappointment. Much wonder, some concern, had been excited the previous evening in consequence of the non-arrival of Miss Pomeroy. This morning Guy received a letter, saying they were not to expect her. The indisposition of her sister's children—which had delayed her coming—had culminated in scarlatina. It was of a very mild kind, she wrote, and would no doubt soon be well over; but she felt that she ought not to come to the abbey and risk bringing the infection with her to Guy's little one. Guy was very sorry; he thought much of having his sister Joan present at the service; but her decision was of course a right one.

And with much pomp and ceremony, the little girl, adorned with her beautiful robes, was carried to the chapel, and there received the solemn rite of baptism. The names bestowed upon her were Mary Alice Joan. Mary after the lord's mother, Alice after his wife, Joan after his sister. In the evening there was a great banquet: at which none shone so brightly or looked so gay as Mrs. Pomeroy.

The love of Rupert was filling her whole heart; and the daily meetings with him, innocent though in one sense they were, had become ominously dear. I shall see him to-day, was the one thought that would flash over her mind when she woke in the morning: and in her gladness she was even civil to her husband.

And Guy? Guy was just trusting to time and to himself to make it all right with his wife; and he had no more notion that she was keeping up the ball of abuse of him, or treacherously meeting Rupert, than had the man in the moon.

But, one evening, two days after the christening, when Alice had gone to the nursery before dinner, Mrs. Wylde came in. Alice looked rather surprised as her mother carefully shut the door and came forward.

"Is anybody in the inner room, Alice?"

"No. Bridget went down stairs for something or other. Why?"

"What brought you to-day marching round the Keep with Rupert Pomeroy?" proceeded Mrs. Wylde, without circumlocution.

At that moment Alice's baby was lying on her lap, its little face turned upwards, its eyes closed in sleep. She bent over the child, seemingly to do something to the frill of its nightgown: in reality to gain time. For the sudden question had startled her.

"Who says I was there?" she asked, her face flushing.

"Now, Alice, don't equivocate: it will not serve you. You *were* there, and with him: and you were with him in the same place one day last week also."

"And if I were?" retorted Alice, resolving to meet the matter boldly, and raising her head. "Is it high treason?"

"It is high folly," returned Mrs. Wylde. "Very unjustifiable,

considering the ill terms that exist between Rupert and the lord, and that he is forbidden the house."

"Rupert is not on ill terms with me. If we—if we chance to meet, I may surely speak to him, and—and walk a few steps by his side?"

"Don't you do anything so disloyal again, Alice. Rupert Pomeroy has lowered the family with his debts and his ill courses; the lord feels it keenly; and you, his wife, should at least have the grace not to countenance him."

"And, pray, mamma, who is it that has brought tales to you of me and my movements?"

"Lettice chanced to see you, and mentioned it to me."

"'Chanced' to mention to you that she saw me last week, and 'chanced' to mention it to you to-day. I should call Lettice a fire-brand."

"Nonsense, Alice! Lettice is nothing of the sort: she had no ill intention in speaking. But, my dear, I beg of you to be cautious. Do not be seen with Rupert Pomeroy again: it would not be pleasant to your husband."

"Oh, of course *he* must be studied!"

"Well," concluded Mrs. Wylde, not altogether liking the rebellion in her daughter's words and manner, "do not forget, Alice, that *I have warned you.*"

Oh, that she had taken the hint! Wilful, mistaken, senseless woman! But for her folly the terrible tragedy that supervened would never have occurred.

It was just as though her mother had spoken to the winds. Nay, the very speaking rendered her present resentful mood only the more resentful. She continued to meet Rupert; partly because she liked to be with him, partly because she knew how angry it would make Guy, and therefore was a kind of revenge upon him. Moreover, as she told herself, she was doing no real harm to anybody: and the pleasure of it would soon be over, for Rupert was going back to London. And thus the days went on to the end.

For the end came: in more senses than one.

## CHAPTER XII.

### IN THE HAUNTED ROOM.

It was the day previous to that which was to witness the departure of the abbey guests, and close upon mid-day. Mrs. Pomeroy had left them to their own devices, and was going forth to another stolen interview, when on turning out of the abbey gates she encountered Bridget and the baby.

"What are you here for?" she began, in her imperious way.

"I ordered you to take the child through the village, up towards the forest."

"I am going, madam. But," added Bridget, dropping her voice, "I have just met Mr. Rupert, and he sent me back with this. He bade me lose no time in giving it into your own hands."

It could scarcely be called a note that the girl held out. It appeared to be a leaf taken from a pocket-book, folded, and tied round with string: as if the writer had not been able to find any better fastening. Mrs. Pomeroy took it gingerly in her fingers, with a suitable show of surprise and reluctance.

"Mr. Rupert sent you with this! To me! Why, what is it, I wonder? What can he want? You need not wait, Bridget."

Bridget turned away with her charge. Her mistress untied the string, and saw a few words in pencil.

"*Don't come to-day.* The Keep is no longer safe: and I suspect that I am being watched. I will be in the west tower to-night; in the haunted room. Come up there for a minute; I will not keep you longer—just that I may explain. You will find the doors open."

Mrs. Pomeroy tore the paper into minute bits, and scattered them to the winds. Turning back to the abbey, she shut herself in her chamber and sat down to think.

To say that the words puzzled her would be saying little to express the utter astonishment that filled her mind. They also alarmed her. "I will be in the west tower to-night;" she soliloquised: "he must surely be out of his senses to say it. He could only get there by passing through the abbey: and that he would not dare attempt just now. What can it mean? There must be some mistake. And the Keep no longer safe!" ran on her thoughts, herself slightly shivering. "Has Guy ——"

Mrs. Pomeroy stopped. Fright drowned the rest of the words. If Guy had indeed found out that she held these interviews in the old Keep, he would be fit to kill her.

A fine state of tremor she was in all day; of suspense; of anxious curiosity to know the best and the worst. But she had no means of satisfying herself; for she dared not walk out on the chance of meeting Rupert. Had he not said he was watched?—perhaps she was watched also? And what Rupert could have meant about the west tower was beyond the bounds of imagination to divine. Mrs. Pomeroy did not attempt to go to it.

The following morning witnessed the departure of the guests. At least, of most of them. It was the 17th of October: a day to be darkly noted henceforth in the annals of the Pomeroyes as the most terrible that had ever dawned for them. Three or four of Guy's particular friends, men, would remain a day or two longer: on the morrow a great onslaught was to be made on the pheasants, and they stayed for it.

At one o'clock Bridget came in from her walk with the baby, and Mrs. Pomeroy, an intensely fond mother, ran upstairs. She was taking the baby from Bridget when the woman gave her another note. Mrs. Pomeroy opened it.

"Why did you not come? I waited for you in the west tower for three hours. I saw you open your chamber window and look out; but the casement where I stood lay in deep shade, and I deemed it might be unwise to open it, or to make any signal. I shall be there again this evening: come for an instant, as I leave for good to-morrow. You will find the doors open. I have chosen the west tower as being perhaps the only place where I should never be looked for."

So ran the note: and Mrs. Pomeroy, reading it a second and a third time, thought surely magic must be at work. That Rupert was not deceiving her in saying he had waited for her in the west tower, she felt sure of—and, indeed, to what end would he do so? Yet—how could he have ascended to it? It was hardly possible that Rupert could have passed through the abbey and got Jerome's keys without being seen by the servants. Could it be that he had bribed the servants—had talked over old Jerome? She hardly thought it; for they were all true, heart and soul, to their reigning lord, and the dissension between him and Rupert was no secret. At the best, it was dangerous. Dangerous for Rupert to attempt anything of the kind; dangerous for him to go up to the west tower. But it would be far more dangerous for her to go—and that she was resolving to do. Full of sinful dissimulation—for dissimulation in such a cause is nothing less than sin—she began scheming how she could best contrive to get up to the west wing unperceived.

She was not feeling well, she told her mother in the afternoon. She told her husband so, making a merit of the necessity of speaking to him, and speaking civilly. She should get them to excuse her at the dinner-table: sick of the continual feasting, weary after the exertion of playing hostess to so many guests, she should enjoy a cup of tea in her own room in preference to dinner; perhaps should go to bed; and her mother could head the table for once for Guy and the two or three men who remained. No opposition was made to this either by her mother or the lord: and all things seemed to go on smoothly for her scheme.

Evening came. Dinner was again laid in the state banqueting-hall below, though so few would this time partake of it; and when they were seated safely at table, Mrs. Wylde facing Guy, Alice's time was come.

Trembling and shaking, not so much at the evil deceit of what she was doing, as at the thought of penetrating by dark—or rather by moonlight, for the moon shone full and bright—to the west tower and that haunted room in it, Mrs. Pomeroy prepared to set forth.

She had felt a horror of the room ever since the day of the accident to the picture, and a vexed feeling had rested on her mind for having gone to it in the teeth of the expressed wishes of Guy ; but, to meet Rupert and say farewell to him, she was ready to dare it now.

Quitting her apartments, watching her opportunities so that she might escape the eyes of servants, sheltering herself now in this corner, now in that, Mrs. Pomeroy got safely below into the cloisters, and thence into the north wing. The north tower door stood open for her, she ascended its stairs, and was speedily at the west wing. Whether she would have had courage to go through the rooms alone remains unsolved, for there, at the top of the stairs, stood Rupert.

"Where's Guy?" he whispered, as he took her hand in greeting; and the anxious question proved that he was not easy as to Guy.

"At dinner in the banquet-hall. I told him I was ill and could not go down. He thinks, no doubt, that I am sulky."

Rupert descended to lock the door, and make all secure; but as they went on into the next rooms, she shook so that he was obliged to hold her. *She* was not easy, either.

"Rupert, this is what I ought not to do, and I would not have come had I known how else to see you. But I am so terribly anxious about the Keep; I have had no peace since that first note of yours, and I wanted to ask you what had happened. Oh, dear! must we go into that haunted chamber?"

"It will be pleasanter for you because you can sit down," he answered, pushing open the door of it.

The moonlight shone into the chamber, revealing its ghastliness—and ghastly enough it looked by this light to the imagination of Mrs. Pomeroy. It shone on the mysterious picture, and on the defacement caused by the burn, when she had accidentally held the candle too close. Whether the canvas was damp, or whether it was in a degree fireproof, or whether the spirit of the nun was present to protect her own image and property, was uncertain; but all the burn had done was to smoulder away into smoke, destroying a portion of the picture, leaving an ugly black stream stretching upwards and across; but, strange to say, sparing alike the face and the prediction. As Mrs. Pomeroy now saw how little damage had been done, compared with the wholesale destruction she had fancied, she thought old Jerome must have been very awkward and clumsy to scorch his hands so much. All things were as they had been left that night. The lord had given no orders upon the matter, and the servants had been only too content not to meddle of their own accord. Perhaps in the subsequent bustle, attendant upon the birth of the little girl, Guy had forgotten all about it.

The prediction was in Mrs. Pomeroy's mind as she stood there

in the moonlight, every line, every word ; the lines were ringing in her ears with an ominous sound.

“ When Pomeroy's heir goes forth a wife to win,  
And Pomeroy's heir goes forth in vain :  
When Pomeroy's lord by a lie doth gain,  
Then woe to the Pomeroy's twain and twain.”

Ominous indeed : more ominous than they had ever sounded before. She heaved a deep sigh, and turned away from the picture. Rupert crossed the room, and took up his standing by the window.

“ Why do you sigh ? ” he asked.

“ Why do I sigh ? I have enough to make me sigh, with one thing and another. And I am in mortal dread of Guy's finding out that I have met you. Have you been dining out ? ” she added, suddenly noticing that he wore black clothes.

“ Ay, at Knox's. I had to come away at the second course.”

“ But how did you manage to get up here ? ” she exclaimed, sitting down on the old velvet-covered couch, to be more at her ease while she put her questions. “ I feel bewildered, I cannot make it out. How many of the servants saw you pass the corridors ? ”

“ Not one, either last night or to-night. I took care.”

“ But, Rupert, a lot of them are always round about Jerome's key-closet.”

“ They did not see me ; and, if they had seen, they could not have known me. Look here.”

He suddenly enveloped himself in a friar's grey cloak, throwing the capuchin—or hood, as the English call it—over his head, so as to conceal his face effectually—just as a fair dame does, when she goes out of heated rooms at night.

“ And your hat ? ”

“ I wore none. I got Father Andrew to lend this cloak to me yesterday,” he continued, turning himself round in the moonlight for Mrs. Pomeroy's inspection. “ He wanted to know what midnight expedition I was bent upon. Sly dogs, our priests,” laughed Rupert ; “ they know the use of the capuchin themselves —— ”

“ Oh, Rupert ! ” she interrupted, her tones savouring of rebuke, “ Father Andrew is as good as he can be.”

“ I believe he is. I was only joking. He likes a joke himself,” added Rupert, speaking out of the hood. “ Had any of the servants seen me in this attire, far from recognising me, they would have flown away scared, thinking the nun there,” pointing to the picture, “ was abroad to-night.”

He threw off the cloak as he spoke. Mrs. Pomeroy rose, went to the window, and peeped out.

“ Caution, Alice. The moon is bright, and your face might be discerned here from the house. Had she not been under the dark clouds last night, you might have seen mine.”

“ I thought it utterly impossible that you could get here : I thought

you must have made some great error. How did you get the keys?"

Rupert Pomeroy stole his lips towards her ear. "Filched them! Stepped aside to Jerome's closet-sanctum, and filched them."

"Filched them!" echoed Mrs. Pomeroy; "Jerome keeps it locked—even if you contrived to escape meeting the servants."

"It is not always locked; and luck favoured me; it often has. I have had possession of them from last night to this."

She thought his manner strange: lighter than customary when with her. He appeared to speak in a laughing, insincere sort of way, as though he were making game of her, or else of his own assertions. Years and years afterwards she remembered it.

"How very imprudent! If Jerome had missed the keys to-day the whole abbey might have been roused."

"No fear," laughed Rupert again. "Jerome would not miss them."

"Rupert!" she suddenly exclaimed, a light breaking in upon her, "Jerome has aided you to come here!"

"No he has not. Not a soul has aided me, save Father Andrew, in the loan of the capuchin; little guessed he that it was to steal a visit to the Lady of Pomeroy. Jerome has aided me in another way, though—you do not ask about the Keep."

"I have been putting it off," she replied, sitting down again on the couch. "The thought of it frightens me."

"We have had a spy upon us, Alice, as sure as that we are here. Whether the lord has found out anything for himself, or whether he has been put on the scent by others, I can't say: I think the latter, for if he had watched you to the Keep, he would most certainly have pounced in upon you."

"But how did you learn anything at all?" she interrupted, not allowing him to go on steadily. Rupert smiled at her impatience. He was leaning against the wall beside the casement, his arms folded.

"I learned it through Jerome. Yesterday he made his appearance at Gaunt's, and began talking to me about the Keep in a low whisper, though Gaunt and his housekeeper, old Nanny, were both abroad and I had the place to myself——"

"What did he say? What did he say?"

"If you interrupt me like this we shall never get to the end of the story," laughed Rupert. And as the reader may be saying the same, it may be as well to give it as it occurred.

Jerome made his appearance at the gamekeeper's lodge the previous morning, as you have now heard, voice, tread, manner alike stealthy, just as a schoolboy's is when he is at some mischief. "Mr. Rupert," he began, "do you go at all to the Keep?"

"Why?" asked Rupert.

"But do you, sir?"

"I have been in there once or twice."

"Ah, I was sure of it!" cried old Jerome. "I wish you'd be away from the village, sir, until matters are smother between you and the lord: ever since that quarrel at the abbey the other night, a feeling has been upon me that worse might come. This morning before breakfast the lord came to me: 'To whom have you entrusted the key of the Keep?' he asked: and I saw by his stern eye that something was wrong. 'It has not been out of my custody since the late lord died,' I answered. 'You lie, Jerome,' he cried: 'You have lent it to my brother, Rupert Pomeroy. Or else you have kept it so loosely, that somebody has been able to get possession of it for him.' Well, Mr. Rupert, with that we went on to the key-closet, which I unlocked; and in my flurry I looked in the wrong niche for the key, and did not see it. The lord stood by with folded arms. 'I thought you were faithful,' he said, and it made my old eyes water, for faithful I am and have ever been to the Lords of Pomeroy—and I am not the less so to you, Mr. Rupert, so far as I can be. The lord saw my distress. 'Some one was in the Keep yesterday, Jerome,' he said in a kinder tone: 'I tried the spring of the private door, and could not get in, therefore somebody must have been there and had got the bar up.' 'Here's the key, Lord of Pomeroy,' I said, showing it to him: 'in my haste I looked in the wrong place. I have not given it to Mr. Rupert.' 'Then,' said the lord, when he saw the key, 'the secret of the spring must be known to some person—and the most likely person is my brother Rupert: who else would dare to meddle with the Keep?' And so, Mr. Rupert," added the old man, "I thought it my duty to come and tell you this, for I conclude, sir, it was you who went into it."

Such was the story Rupert repeated to Mrs. Pomeroy. Ere it was concluded, she rose in terror and grasped Rupert's arm; terror at the thought of what might have come of it, had the door of the Keep not been barred. It's true that the worst the lord could have seen (and this has been said before) was Rupert lodged on his high shelf, and Mrs. Pomeroy swaying herself on the low stool opposite, abusing himself confidentially: but that would be quite enough, as we all must allow, to raise the ire of most husbands, more especially one so fiery as the haughty Lord of Pomeroy.

"Jerome added that Guy took possession of the key," continued Rupert to Mrs. Pomeroy, "and reiterated his warning to me not to enter it again. The foolish old fellow actually had tears in his eyes. I fancy he knows you were there with me."

"Oh!" she screamed.

"I gathered it from a remark he made—that one of the maids had seen you walking with me by the Keep. Confound all women's tongues! And now, Alice, you know why I sent you that first note by Bridget——"

"If she had shown it to anyone?" gasped Mrs. Pomeroy.

"Who? Bridget? No fear. She is one of those who are true to

the Pomeroy's, heart and soul. And I really was unable to think of any safe place but this, where we could meet for an explanation and say farewell. Guy is as sly as a fox : and as keen as one, once his doubts are aroused. Of all places, he'd never think of the haunted room."

"Do you really go to-morrow?"

"I go to-morrow. I should have gone to-day had you come last night. It may be better that I should be away, as old Jerome says. Badly though Guy has treated me, I don't wish to sow dissension in his home : and my staying here might result in that."

She was weeping silently. Rupert Pomeroy was very dear to her, and she was about to lose sight of him, perhaps for ever : but she, as silently, wiped away the tears, so that he should see them not.

There is an expressive Italian proverb—I forget precisely how it runs, but the sense is, that for the debtor's bond and the stolen interview, time flies on wings. On wings, most certainly, it appeared to fly for those in the haunted room. Mrs. Pomeroy may have been unconscious of its flitting ; let her answer it ; but when the courtyard clock rang out ten, she was still there.

With a faint cry of dismay she started up and approached the window. Was it indeed ten?—or only nine? She strained her eyes on the clock, for it was above the entrance archway, and faced her ; but, strain them as she would, she could not make out its hands : the dial was too far off. Rupert followed her, though little cared he what the hour might be.

"Have you a watch, Rupert?"

"No, I left mine at Gaunt's : the spring's broken."

"I do fear it was ten that struck. And, what if Guy should have been up, and missed me? I must go at once ; without delay."

As she turned from the window, accustomed now to the faint light of the room, she distinguished a tall dark figure standing up, right against the picture. Fascinated and terror stricken, she gazed ; not with ghostly terror, but with terror far more ominous and real—far too well did she discern the grand outlines of that form, and knew it to be no other than her husband's. Rupert, who had a good sight, was peering at the opposite clock, when he found himself suddenly and unexpectedly startled by his companion's seizing hold of him and shrieking out in her agony of shame—"Oh Rupert ! Rupert !" For surely it was nothing less than shame, to her, caught in this clandestine interview !

The Lord of Pomeroy strode forward, his eyes glaring, his white features terribly livid in the moonlight. How stealthily he must have come up ! And—how long had he been there ?

*(To be continued.)*

## THE WITCH AND THE SAUCEPAN.

**W**ITCHCRAFT in the latter end of the nineteenth century? Are not you playing upon our credulity when you expect us to believe such a thing? Not so, we grieve to say. Almost every village in our favoured province of Ulster has its witch, and also its wise man or woman who possesses a counter-charm for witchcraft, however acquired.

The witch goes in and out of her neighbours' houses, and is treated with universal respect. The superstitious people, believing that she has the power of doing them serious injury, propitiate her with gifts, and she dwells among them unmolested.

It does not follow that she must be either old or ugly. The owner of the evil eye in one townland well known to the writer, happens to be a fair, delicate-looking young mother, possessor of a handsome cow, which she tends so carefully and feeds so well that she is able to clothe her children with the proceeds of the milk and butter. But her large churnings cause great heartburnings in the neighbourhood: it is firmly believed that every ounce of butter in excess of the usual quantity has been abstracted from her neighbours' churns—drawn through the keyhole perhaps, or spirited away by some other occult and mysterious process.

Nor must the witch of necessity be a Roman Catholic; the blue-eyed enchantress aforesaid is a Protestant: a respectable, but ignorant young woman, whose chief failing in educated eyes appears to be a violent temper.

Many are the spells resorted to by the credulous people to avert the evil influence.

An absurd instance of belief in witchcraft occurred very lately in the parish of Killea, Co. Donegal. A poor day labourer, father of a large family, managed to save enough money to buy a cow. His purchase did very well at first, but suddenly her milk failed, she became languid, and refused to eat. The distress of Brown and his wife was extreme. Their neighbours kindly sympathised, but warned them that they must certainly have an enemy, and enquired whether they had had any frequent visitor of late.

On thinking the matter over, both husband and wife recollected that a poor old woman, Rosanna Harrigan by name, had called at their house on three successive mornings, for the purpose of warming herself at their fire—that she had remained in the house for a considerable time, chatting pleasantly, and making friendly enquiries about their prosperity, particularly asking after the welfare of their new cow. Mrs. Brown remembered that she had fingered her rosary while

speaking, but, for all that, it might be that she had been working some spell at the same time.

The wise neighbours next suggested that it would be advisable to apply to some "knowledgable body" for a counter-spell; and Brown accordingly set out to visit an old man who lived a few miles beyond St. Johnston, and was supposed to have the gift of curing elfshot animals. Poor little Rosanna Harrigan's iniquity was related, and Brown was desired to go to the sexton of the meeting-house, to receive from his hand some clay from the grave of the last buried corpse there, to carry it carefully home, mix it with water, and rub the sick cow's back with the mixture.

Full of faith, Brown did as directed, and the cow recovered. Quite as ridiculous as the above is the well-known story of Moiley and the saucepan.

Moiley was a handsome Kerry cow, the property of William Jamison, a well-to-do farmer in the townland of Clashygowan. She stood in a warm byre with five companions, good milkers all of them, but not one so valuable as her brindled self. Moiley's milk yielded the thickest cream and yellowest butter that was ever carried to Derry market; and the quantity was as remarkable as the quality. It was well known that the three snowy pans in the left-hand corner of the dairy-shelf were filled with her milk alone; and Jamison's good fortune was commented upon by many a cabin fireside where the unlettered crones met to gossip about their neighbours' affairs.

"The master kept her milk by itself, an' feen a drap but it went intil the churn, when we were filling the butt that brought the biggest price in the market," said Becky Gallagher, a former servant at the farm, who had lately married a day labourer, and settled in one of the cottier houses.

Becky was a middle-aged, one-eyed, and harsh-featured woman, with a sinister and forbidding expression, which made her repulsive, independently of her ugliness. Good worker though she was, Jack Gallagher was not envied by his neighbours; but she was known to have a temper, and was therefore treated with a certain amount of respect by the inmates of the houses on either side.

"An' how will Moiley do with the new girl?" asked Mary Boyd, coming in to borrow a turf basket.

"Oh, bravely, I'll hold you!" replied the one-eyed woman; "she's cautious enough anyway. I went on an errand to the house this morning when she was churning, an' I saw her throw a lock of salt into the churn when she seen me come in. Nae harm 'ill come to Moiley with *her*!"

As Becky said this, an evil gleam came into her grey eye, and she looked as though she had no kind wishes for the new girl, or for her master.

"It wad be a pity if anything wad ail Moiley, or e'er a cow belonging to William Jamison," replied the last comer, pausing with

her turf-basket by the fireside, and looking gravely at Becky—"a civil, decent boy that never hurt chick nor child in his life."

The "civil, decent boy" was a grey-haired man of sixty, who had remained a bachelor from choice, overseeing his indoor concerns as thoroughly as he was able, but obliged to leave much to his servants.

Mrs. Boyd, though only the mistress of a cabin, had the honour of being his cousin, and therefore felt it incumbent upon her to visit the farm kitchen from time to time, and give his "girl" the benefit of her supervision. Much hatred had she incurred from Becky by so doing, but her presence now put the latter upon her guard.

"I'll teach the hussy to throw salt into her churn when I come in!" muttered she, as Mrs. Boyd left the cottage.

The new servant had complied with a very general superstition. Becky's frequent visits to the farmhouse byre and dairy had frightened her, and she could not believe that a good motive brought her so often. That Becky's one eye was an evil eye she felt perfectly convinced, and she had been told that a pinch of salt put into the churn when an envious neighbour happened to enter the house was a very potent counter-charm; so, desiring to be faithful to her employer, she had but acted up to her lights.

Had she been a nurse, she would have crossed the tongs upon the cradle when forced to leave her charge alone, for fairy influence was still powerful in the "back country" where she had been brought up. There, too, dwelt a witch who throve upon the fresh butter which she drew out of neighbours' churns through the key-holes: a witch who had once been pursued by the huntsmen for an entire morning in the form of a hare; had been followed to the door of a cabin, and discovered breathless and panting upon the bed, in her own human, and far from attractive, shape.

The new servant, knowing these things, was only, as we have said, doing her duty by her master in acting up to her lights.

But Becky Gallagher vowed vengeance. Moiley's milk began to fail from that day, until by degrees there remained but half a pan where there had been three full pans on the dairy shelf.

"Wha's come to Moiley, Peggy, my girl?" used Jamison to enquire, as he emptied the wretched pigginful into the pan.

Peggy could have attempted an answer, but was afraid to put her thought into words. The affair became so serious at length that the farmer went down to the cottier houses to consult his cousin, Mrs. Boyd. Shutting the door carefully, he sat down on a creeper in front of the turf fire, and proceeded leisurely to light his pipe, and smoke in silence. His cousin and her daughter Mary, a young girl of fifteen, felt sure some weighty revelation was coming, but they spun on, one each side of the hearth, and waited patiently until he should speak. Like his rugged Presbyterian forefathers, he was wont to think much and speak little; but the time for making a confidante was come; so he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, put it in his

waistcoat pocket, and turning his small, keen eyes slowly upon Mrs. Boyd, thus addressed her :

"I'm saying, Mary, Moiley's going dry, an' she's sax months off the calving."

"Save us, William!" and the two spinning-wheels stopped suddenly—"guide us an' save us, man, you dinna tell me sae!"

"Ay, Mary, it's nae lie I'm telling ye." There was another pause.

"I was minded," proceeded he at length, "to ax the minister's advice after meeting next Sabbath, for he's a man that has a power o' larning. What do *you* allow me to do, Mary?"

"Wait a wee, William," cried Mrs. Boyd eagerly, exchanging significant glances with her daughter; "dinna let a word out o' your mouth, gude or bad, but leave it to me. There's a very knowledgable woman lives up at Knockan, an' if anybody has put a spell on the cow, *she* can lift it. I'm weel acquaint wi' her, an' Mary, there, may run for her; but not a word, if you tak' my bidding."

She dropped her voice, and looked cautiously towards the door.

"I dinna know that I've an ill-wisher in the world," replied Jamison, doubtfully.

"Hoot, William, *she'll* find that out: she's a knowledgable woman, I tell you! She'll know wha's come to Moiley."

The farmer's long and cautious face looked but half convinced; he thought over and over the whole circle of his neighbours and acquaintances, but could not believe he had an enemy; however, he had come to his cousin for advice, and it behoved him to abide by it. He went for the hundredth time to examine his sick cow, while young Mary, after receiving some explicit directions from her mother, set out for Knockan.

It was a lovely day, and the walk was extremely picturesque. Mary paused to draw breath at the very top of the hill, a few yards from the tiny thatched cabin where Mrs. Doolan, the wise woman, dwelt. She ran her fingers through her shock of matted hair, and turned her cheeks to catch the breeze that always blew up there, even on the warmest day, as she stood and gazed down upon the valley; but she had no idea that the view was in any wise beautiful or interesting.

There lay Jamison's farmhouse, his offices and rich fields, and the row of humbler abodes where his cottiers lived. Many another farmstead and lowly cabin, in the midst of cornfields whose exquisite green was just becoming tinged with a pale gold, lay spread out before her, with the reed-fringed lake, and the little island where once had stood the stately castle of an Irish king. The castle was gone, but crab-apple and hazel trees adorned the island, seagulls and plovers hovering over it in an airy, musical cloud, and lake and island were beautiful still.

Then far, far away arose the pale, shadowy mountains, not grey and frowning as they usually are in our damp climate, but sharing in the splendour imparted by the rare sunshine, which lit up the landscape,

until gold and green, blue and purple, melted into one another, and shimmered in a tender haze.

Mary entered Mrs. Doolan's cottage. An old, bent woman, with grey hair and a quaint, ugly face, intersected with a hundred lines, sat crouching by the hearth, smoking her pipe.

"Will you be seated, jewel?" said she, politely, when the girl had made known her name. Mary thanked her, but remained standing while she explained that her mother had sent her on an errand to Mrs. Doolan, and mentioned William Jamison's cow.

"Sick, an' failed in her milk?" said the old woman, gravely, putting up her pipe and moving as quickly as she could towards the cupboard. "We maun see to that, Mary; we maun see to that! Wait a wee minute till I get my cloak an' this paper o' yerbs."

Her grey cloak was put on, a scarlet handkerchief wound round her head, her stick taken in her hand, a dirty-looking packet thrust into her pocket, and she was ready for the road.

"Now, Tom, you'll be civil an' decent, sir," commanded she, locking up the black cat, the geese, and the cock and hens, and taking the key of her cabin.

There was a business-like air in her proceedings that much impressed Mary; but she was not very garrulous on her way down hill: she made out the journey with difficulty, but gravely, as one who had an important work on hand.

Arrived at the farm, she and Mary went quietly into the kitchen by the back door.

"Run awa' to the town for a ha'p'orth o' new pins, Mary," said the wise woman.

Mary found the farmer, Peggy, and Mrs. Doolan all assembled in the byre on her return with the pins.

"Kneel down, girl," said the latter, "an' stick them pins up to the heads in the ground round the cow's stake. Ay, that'll do, bravely," as Mary obeyed, the farmer and servant looking on in respectful silence.

"Now, honey, you just tak' these yerbs and put them to boil in the wee tin on the kitchen fire; an' dinna, for your life, let anybody lift the lid. If man or woman opens the door an' comes into the kitchen, an' mak's over to the fire to lift the lid o' the wee tin, that'll be the one that put the spell upon the cow. William an' the girl an' me'll stop here, and go you an' do what I bid you."

Mary felt the full weight of the responsibility laid upon her: she looked from the farmer, who stared at his sick cow and said not a word, to the dirty paper of herbs which the crone held out to her.

"Mind what I bid you," repeated Mrs. Doolan, pressing the packet into her hand.

Very carefully she strewed the dried herbs on the bottom of the tin, filled it with spring water, set it upon the fire, and put on the lid, and while she waited for it to boil, employed herself in arranging the dishes at the dresser.

Thus engaged, her back was towards the door; but she soon heard quick steps outside, the latch was lifted, and Becky Gallagher, the one-eyed woman, hurrying into the kitchen, made her way up to the hearth, and was in the act of raising the lid, when Mary darted over to her in the very nick of time, caught her arm, and wrathfully commanded her to let the tin alone.

"Your tea is boiling over, Mary," replied the other, still endeavouring to raise the lid.

"That's not tea. You know very well that I mak' nae tea in this kitchen," returned the young girl. "You'll just let that tin alone!"

Baffled and confused, the woman went away, muttering that she had meant no offence.

"It was weel you didna let her lift the lid: if she had got lifting it an' looking in, Moiley wad ha' died for sartin," said the wise woman, when Mary, pale and breathless, carried the herb potion into the byre, and related her adventure.

"To think of Becky!" said the grave farmer, his long face an inch longer than usual from the shock—"to think of Becky!" he repeated slowly.

"I know'd rightly the way it wad be," replied Mrs. Doolan; "but it's gude we hae found out the one that cast the spell: she'll no offer to stir a cow belonging to you again, ye may be sure o' that."

So Moiley was given the mixture, while the wise woman muttered incantations, and from that day the three milk-pans were as full as ever, and the butter churned therefrom as yellow and abundant.

Becky talked loudly in the cottages about Mary Boyd's impertinence to her when she wanted to help her by preventing her tea from boiling over; but she met with cold replies and suspicious looks on all sides, and soon made up her mind that it would be well for her to persuade her husband to seek another service at the next hiring day. Mrs. Doolan grew in the esteem of her neighbours. It was not her habit to take money for such good offices as she had rendered William Jamison; but she did not refuse a comfortable glass of spirits, an ounce of tobacco, some tea and sugar, or a small piece of the superior butter which her incantations had restored to Moiley. She managed to make a very good living out of her supernatural lore.

As to the farmer, he rejoiced that he had not troubled the minister with the history of his dairy perplexities, but had instead applied to his cousin Mrs. Boyd, whom he regarded ever afterwards as a most sensible woman.

The transaction made some little stir in the townland of Clashygowan, and at last came round to the minister's ears. Jamison was a steady member of the congregation, an elder, and a communicant, and always paid his pew rent to the day: the minister felt it his duty to remonstrate with him upon his encouragement of the popular superstition; but must do so delicately and gently, lest he should offend so valuable a prop of the manse and meeting-house.

They were seated at tea in "the room," a stately apartment, seldom used. The minister and his host grew confidential over their tea: the story of Moiley's dangerous illness and wonderful recovery was related, Jamison was congratulated, and the minister enquired what had injured the cow.

It was then that the tale of Becky's iniquity, and of Mrs. Doolan's skill, came forth.

"Oh, Jamison, do you really believe that?" asked Mr. Long, with a smile, when he had heard the whole story.

"What can I do, sir? Sure I seen it with my own eyes. I wasna' too forward to credit it, but seeing's believing, they say."

"The nineteenth century, Jamison," continued the minister, piteously; "and one Robertson, one Church Education, and two National Schools within a circuit of three miles, let alone the meeting-house and the minister!"

"Do you say there's no such things as witches, sir?" asked the farmer, turning upon him.

"Certainly I do; I say so most emphatically."

"Well, sir, what do you say to this?" replied Jamison, triumphantly opening his pictorial Bible at the picture of Samuel and the Witch of Endor.

"She was no witch," returned the minister, rousing himself like a war horse who scents the battle. "The woman was horribly terrified when she saw Samuel: she would have pretended, no doubt, that she saw him, or she would have contrived some optical illusion for the purpose of imposing upon Saul; but Samuel was raised without her power, and surely no one was more terrified and surprised at his appearance——"

"A message for the minister." The door was thrown open, and a little errand boy rushed in. "The mistress is ill—you're to drive on for the doctor, sir, this minute. I was to bid you not be putting off your time."

The minister was reluctantly forced to take his leave, assuring Jamison that he would soon return to finish their conversation.

"Ay, converse away," said the farmer grimly to himself, as he carefully folded up his cherished picture. "Converse away! But ye'll no converse me into believing that the book is wrang, and that there was nae Witch o' Endor. Not believe in the Witch o' Endor!" repeated he, when barring his door for the night, and there was both sorrow and scorn in his tone.

No matter how the interrupted conversation may be finished at some future time, Mr. Long has made a fatal impression upon Jamison: he *may*, indeed, continue to attend meeting and pay his stipend, but it is a question whether he will ever again look upon the minister as a sound teacher or orthodox divine.

## THE COMET.

THERE was great commotion in the village. Some of the men had been in the neighbouring town, and in the inn there had read the county paper, and had come home full of the astounding news that a comet was rushing headlong into space, precipitating itself straight upon our planet ; so that, as the astronomers calculated, it must swallow us up on the 12th of August, 1872.

The village of A—— lies in a remote corner of Austria, and our good people do not come into contact with the ever-progressing world beyond its limits. Consequently they are rather backward in the knowledge of natural science, though far from being dull or uninterested in things lying nearer to them than the stars in the heavens.

But now, this was a thing to stir up their interest in astronomy : a comet coming straight down upon the earth. A comet : a thing imagined so far away that until now no one had dreamt of troubling about it, except only to consider its appearance in the sky as a sign of war and various other kinds of woe.

The villagers quite understood there was no fun in the matter. The learned astronomer himself, from whose work an extract had been published in the paper, had his apprehensions as to what effect this violent meeting of comet and earth would have on the latter ; and although the men of A—— did not understand the burden of his learned suppositions, still it set them thinking, and brought them to the conclusion that one might well tremble before the consequences of such an unheard of collision.

Would it be the end of the world ?—of the stars beginning to fall from heaven ? But the comet was not falling after all—it was madly rushing straight upon us. How dreadful ! What was the purport of its singular behaviour—was it coming to destroy the earth with fire ?

There was a great deal of talk about the new and strange matter but no one was the wiser for it. At last the bearers of the news, only half credulous themselves, accompanied by those who refused to believe one iota of the tale, repaired to the schoolmaster's house, a neat whitewashed building, standing in the middle of a well-cultivated orchard.

But if the orchard testified to good culture, the schoolmaster's books told a very different tale ; they had been thrown into a corner of a lumber-closet many years before, and had never seen daylight since. The alphabet, a small volume of Bible stories, and one or two others, were all that was requisite for his daily use. From these few books he had taught one generation of boys and girls after another to read, write, cipher, and sing ; and for thirty-seven years he had never felt the need of increasing his literary store.

He had another book though—a manuscript one, in his own handwriting, out of which he sometimes read to young and old. It was a bulky volume, composed of a great number of copy-books, fastened together and neatly bound in cloth by the author himself. In it he had written his experience of practical gardening, of brewing, cultivating bees, nursing domestic animals, and the like; and the villagers were in the habit of consulting him in preference to anyone else. There was no husbandman equal to him in the place, and he was held in greater respect by the people for this than if he had possessed the wisdom of a professor of the university. For thirty-seven years he had worked in the village without quitting it, except for an excursion into the mountains or a trip to the next town.

Now the schoolmaster had read about the comet before anyone else in the place; but as a wise man he kept silence on a matter he could not explain. Rack his brain as he would he could not revive any slumbering recollection of astronomy, nor find anything to aid his better understanding or enable him to expound the subject to others.

He was, however, not quite unprepared for the visit, and when the men came to him he thought it best to take a cheerful view of the case, and dilated to them on his experience that many things, looking strange in the distance, are quite natural and harmless when viewed close at hand.

"So let's expect the fellow with a calm mind," he said. "We will see what he is like when he comes; no use troubling about him before the time."

"But won't he set the world on fire?" they asked.

"We'll put it out if he does," he returned, confidently.

"There would be more flames, I warrant, than all the water in our wells could quench," said one.

"It may not touch us after all," said the schoolmaster, always inclined to hope for the best. "Why shouldn't it fall far away on yonder hills, into the wood, or beyond it into the lake?"

There was a general laugh. If it would but tumble into the lake and drown itself, they would drag it out when cool and have a good look at it, and then exhibit it in the market-place. Yes, stick it up on a pole with its tail turned upwards, and have a dance around it.

After this the good old man thought the occasion a fitting one to produce a few bottles of his own growth, and the cheering influence of a glass of wine dispelled in a great measure the rather gloomy impression the gravity of the matter had made upon their minds. They left the house but little comforted though, and very much inclined to believe that there really was a comet coming, this fact having been tacitly admitted by the schoolmaster.

The Pfarrer's (Monsieur le Curé) house is not far distant from the school. A green slope, cut by an allée of poplar trees, leads up from the latter to the church, and immediately opposite stands the "Pfarrei," or Pfarrhaus.

Amongst those who were most eager to call upon the priest was—to everyone's surprise—old Blasius.

Old Blasl never entered the church, and the minister of grace was to him only the person to whom he had to pay his tithe in grain, vegetables, &c. He would look away when he chanced to meet the old Pfarrer, that he might save himself the trouble of taking off his hat to him. Not to say that Blasl never prayed!—oh, he prayed. Most fervently did he pray every night that no fire, water, or thief might come near the treasure he had hidden deep in the earth under his bed, and in which his whole heart was bound up.

And now, would all these worshipped coins go to destruction, with the rest of the world? Perhaps something more might be learned about the matter at the Pfarrer's; therefore he entered the house whose threshold his foot had not crossed since the time of his marriage, thirty years before.

There was the scrupulous neatness and stillness reigning in the Pfarrei peculiar to a priest's habitation, showing that there was no wife or children to break the monastic order.

The Herr Pfarrer of A—— was a very aged man, past eighty at the time of our tale; and his sister, about eight or nine years younger than himself, kept house for him. A young priest, his "co-operator," who lived in a back room, was the third inmate of the spacious mansion, and an old servant the fourth. That was all.

The Pfarrer received the men with his usual kindliness; was very glad to see them, and happy to be able to give them his advice and consolation. For that purpose he administered to them a good dose of common-place truths, all very good in themselves, and suitable for any tribulation whatever. After having warmly assured them that God would not forsake them if they did not turn from Him, he dismissed them; and they departed, more, less, or not at all comforted, according to each man's nature.

Before they had all left the hall, Frau Barbara, the curé's sister, noiselessly emerged from a corridor, and, catching hold of Blasl's sleeve, she whispered to him: "Blasl, I am glad I have an opportunity of speaking to you. What is all this about your daughter? Surely you will think better of it before you make your poor child miserable for life?"

"Has she been and complained of me?" he enquired angrily.

"She *has* been here; you know she always comes to help me on busy days. The poor child cried bitterly—and no wonder, after being engaged to that nice young man, Lorenz, and now seeing her engagement broken off by her father, without any just cause or reason. Surely you will not do this?"

"That is my own affair," he gruffly interrupted. "I suffer no one to meddle with my concerns; you might have known that before now, Frau Barbara." And impatiently he turned to leave the hall.

"Nay, you must not leave me without listening to another word.

You may have had your own reasons for breaking off with Lenz, but surely, Blasl, you cannot think of giving Maria to Steffl—Steffl, the scandal of the neighbourhood? You must know that Steffl is an unprincipled man, a good-for-nothing, a spendthrift —— ”

“ Steffl is no spendthrift! he is—he has—no matter what!—you wouldn’t understand my motives; and I really don’t see that I need account for my actions to anyone in this world, Frau Barbara.”

“ Not in this world, Blasl; no, not in *this*! but, mind you, this world is coming to grief, they say. Blasl, Blasl! think of this! If it *be* true: if really in a few days this world, with all our trumpery goods and treasures, is going to destruction: how shall we appear there, before the judgment seat, divested of all our earthly riches? ”

For a moment the old man stared at her with frightened, glazed eyes; he staggered, and turning away, tottered down the slope. Her words had startled him to the heart.

Old Blasl had not always been the hard, inflexible miser he was now. He used in his younger years to be of a jolly, easy disposition, and rather extravagant habits. When quite unexpectedly inheriting a considerable sum of money, he was suddenly seized with love for those shining, sparkling coins—the passionate, jealous love of a miser. He loved the coins for themselves, not for the comfort they might have brought into his house; therefore he would not put them out to interest. He could not make up his mind to loose his grasp upon them for one minute; would not trust anyone with the sight of them. He dug a deep hole under the boards upon which his bed rested, and therein he hid his treasure, and there from henceforward lay his heart, buried with it. He saved and stinted and scraped together in order to hoard up one piece of gold or silver after another with the rest. But his life was a troubled one, and grew more and more so as his treasure increased. Night and day he could not rest from anxiety lest anyone should discover its hiding-place, or lest any kind of danger should befall his cottage, which enclosed the cherished idol.

Besides his money, Blasl cherished a daughter, the last remaining one of a numerous family. He loved her in his way: as the future possessor of his wealth; who would, in her turn—so he hoped—worship it with her whole heart. He held her in high respect, but not without keen pangs of jealousy, raised by the thought that he *must* some day, whether he liked it or not, leave everything to her. These fits of jealousy grew more frequent as he advanced in age, and poor Maria felt surprised and shocked at the dislike to her he evinced at moments without any visible cause. She never guessed the truth; she did not know the secret of her father’s room. He had not been a hard father to her—far from it, for he had not been a father at all; he never noticed her or cared for her, neither missed her when she was away, nor seemed glad to see her return to him.

Still, in spite of all that, in spite of the utter want of parental

affection—poor Maria had lost her mother when she was an infant—she had not been an unhappy child. She had grown up amongst her kind neighbours. They loved the lonely little girl, who would come to them in search of all the comforts and joys she missed at home.

A lovely, bright-eyed child was Maria, with an active, helpful spirit: always eager to learn, and immediately turning to account what she had learnt, either in her own home or for others. She was sure to be on the spot wherever there was anything going on; and helping her neighbours about the house and garden, in the fields and woods, she learnt to understand all kinds of work. At fifteen, when the old servant of the house—a stern, taciturn, uncongenial woman—died, she was able and willing to turn to, and managed to keep her father's house in the accustomed order, so that the old man scarcely noticed any change.

Amongst all those who loved Maria, she had two particular friends. Of one we will speak later; the other was Herr Schmitt, the school-master, who certainly was her very best friend, because the most disinterested.

The child's brightness, her eagerness to learn, soon struck her master; he found in this little girl a mind far superior to that of the usual run of children. He gave her private lessons, walked with her about the woods and fields, and in talking to her found ways and means to impart a great deal of knowledge no one else in the village aspired to. He seldom failed to bring her something to read when coming from town, and every Christmas-eve there was sure to be a story-book for Maria under the Christmas tree at the school-master's. Thus the very loneliness of her life was brightened by joys that few other children knew, and which helped her to bear the dullness of her father's house.

A few weeks before our story begins we might have beheld Maria grown up into a handsome blue-eyed lass of eighteen, with a wealth of golden hair, a bright smile, and a merry song on her lips, gladdening one's sight with her appearance of youthful grace, strength, health, and freshness. But now smile and song have died away, and sighs and tears have taken their place.

Blas! Blas! how could you have the heart?—oh! but his heart lies in an old iron pot many feet under the ground.

When Maria was five years old she and a neighbour's son, a few years older than herself, pledged their troth to each other—just as children *will* do. But in this case the attachment, instead of being lessened or forgotten in the course of years, grew with them, and every year added to its strength. This contributed greatly to Maria's happiness, and accounts for the brightness of her disposition.

Lorenz was a boy of high and buoyant spirits, and the course of their true love seemed to run quite smoothly; for when he talked to Maria's father, the latter found no objection to the match, and the two were solemnly betrothed. They were both rather young to be

married at once, and Blasl had a reason of his own for putting the marriage off. He was loth to give to his daughter her portion, the two thousand florins she had from her mother—which naturally had remained in his keeping—not to speak of any dowry on his part, which he never dreamt of being asked for in his lifetime.

So far all went well. But Blasl had given his consent on the ground of an inheritance Lenz expected from his great-uncle, who had promised to make him his heir. When the latter died, however, no will could be found. People said it had been done away with, which was very likely. So the money was divided between a number of relations, and Lenz's share became a small one. Blasl broke off the engagement at once: no tears, no supplications could prevail against his decision. Nay, not satisfied with this, he wanted to force another husband upon his daughter, which, to the dismay of the whole village, was no other than Steffl—the very last man people would have thought he would fix upon. It was shocking! They talked of witchcraft, and were not far from the point. Steffl had bewitched the old man by a magic power old Blasl could not withstand.

Stefan had been a soldier, and had only returned to the village about a year ago. He was soon considered the plague of the neighbourhood—ruining the boys by inducing them to spend their nights in public-houses, running after every girl, working when he pleased, and scattering his small earnings—Steffl was a regular rake, there was no mistake about it.

Amongst the girls, he made love to there was one, a quiet, rather weak-minded lassie, who lived with an old aunt of hers in a little hut in the woods. Consequently she did not hear much of the talk in the village. And even if she had heard about Steffl's loose life, would she have believed it? No, for love is equally deaf and blind, and Lisbeth loved the handsome, dashing visitor who condescended to seek her in her poor home.

Poor Lisbeth! she believed every word Stefan said, and thought herself solemnly engaged to him for life. It pleased Stefan to go on as if he intended to marry her in a very short time, and make her the mistress of the splendid house and all the riches he possessed in some very far-off country.

Now, when Steffl heard of Lenz's changed circumstances, he thought the moment had come to win rich Blasl's fair daughter for himself. It is not astonishing that he should have tried for such a prize, but that he should have succeeded was most extraordinary. The poorest man in the neighbourhood would have refused his child to a man like Steffl. However, he *did* succeed—at least with the father: he had chosen a sure way to lead him straight to his aim.

After having for some time given the old man hints that he was keeping a secret from the villagers, he one day made him a startling confidence. He was concealing a treasure; yes, a sackful of gold. Neither more nor less than twenty thousand florins, all in gold! and

he behaved like a beggar before the village from fear of being robbed. But how did he get possession of so much gold? Ah! he had been a soldier. Everybody knows what strange fortunes may befall a man in times of war. When his eight years of service were over he left his regiment instead of taking a re-engagement, as he had always intended to do, and straightway travelled home with his treasure.

Old Blasius listened with every fibre of his gold-thirsty heart. His soul was so full of Steffl's strange luck that there was no room left for doubt. His consideration for Steffl was great from this moment. The two grew fast friends, to the wonder of the whole village and of poor Maria. They were constantly seen walking together, and Steffl sat for hours and hours at Blasl's, worrying Maria with his most unwelcome courtship.

Blasl, who had never treated his daughter harshly, now behaved with cruelty towards her: he forgot himself so far at times as to strike her, using every means to force Steffl upon her notice. Oh, the miserable life poor Maria now led! Her father had threatened to kill her if she attempted to see Lenz, who was at present working at some distant farm, and could only come to A—— on Sundays. Moreover, he locked her up in the house, and he and Steffl kept watch over her always on that day, so that she could not even go to church.

And poor Lisbeth, when she found herself forsaken for rich Blasl's daughter? In her despair she ran away, and was seen no more. Her aunt came down to the village to look for her in every house, to ask everybody after her: no one had seen her.

One day a little boy, who was crab fishing on the shallow border of the river, found a silk kerchief entangled in the reeds; and people by this knew poor Lisbeth's fate. They openly reproached Steffl with her death; but he did not care what they said, and inwardly rejoiced that his good luck had removed the only stone in his way.

"It was very wise of her," thus his thoughts ran, "to do herself what I should have been obliged to do for her, had she meant to come forward and stand in my way."

## II.

When Blasl came home from the Pfarrer's he first scolded his daughter well for having complained of him to Frau Barbara; then, as a punishment, he locked her up in her room. He had a double reason for doing the latter, for when he had assured himself that all the doors and shutters of the house were well fastened, he lit a little lamp, removed his huge bedstead with a vigour one would not have expected in that shrivelled form, lifted the boards, and shovelled and scraped both with spade and hands until he brought his precious iron pot to light. He then tenderly lifted it out, uncovered it with one trembling hand, and approached the lamp with the other to let the

contents sparkle in its rays, his tears streaming down upon the gold as he did so. When he had wept over it to his heart's content he covered it up, buried it again, and put everything over it in its accustomed place. Then he blew out the light, opened the shutters, and went about his day's work with a heavy heart.

The days ran on; people's most fervent wishes could not keep one of them back; and as the dreaded time approached their apprehensions grew boundless. Everybody now believed in the comet, and that it would bring the end of the world with it!

The peasants were not so much afraid for their own lives—they knew that death might take them by surprise at any time—they grieved for the impending destruction of all their earthly possessions, the fruit of not their own labour only, but of that of their fathers and grandfathers for many generations back, and which they had always hoped to leave behind them to their children and children's children. Whatever they now looked on seemed to preach to them of the vanity of all earthly pride; whatever each used to take the greatest delight in became now the source of the bitterest grief.

Thus one would look with tearful eyes on the ranges of well-cured hams and sausages in his larder, agonized by the thought that no one would enjoy those stored-up dainties in the future. Another would walk about his fields, shaking his head mournfully at the plentiful corn, doomed before it was ripe for the scythe. A third lamented over the fine old trees in his wood; there was not even time left for cutting them down and marketing the timber; and if it could be done, where would be the use? Men grew lax in their work, maidens gave up spinning for their marriage outfits, women neglected their households, children had dreams about the comet's arrival.

The good Pfarrer had prayers said to calm their minds; the school-master visited from house to house with comforting words; all was of no avail: the panic grew with the flying hours, and reached its climax when the awful day arrived.

The 12th of August dawned upon them rather sultry and heavy; there was something oppressive in the air that added to their alarm. Every passing hour increased their anguish. A thick fog, which covered parts of the country at nightfall—a quite unheard-of phenomenon at this season—terrified them. Anxiously they watched the gradual dying out of daylight. Would it ever dawn upon them again?

As if by common accord, they all expected the comet in the night; it never struck them that it might in its career meet the earth in the daytime; and it seemed most natural in a comet to fix upon midnight for its extraordinary performance—as all unearthly appearances have ever come at that critical moment, when one day meets another to part in the same instant for ever.

No one would go to bed on that night; that was the tacit agreement.

The inn was crowded that evening. Most of those who had no

particular home to take care of assembled there, to work themselves up by drink and talk to that pitch of courage necessary to meet such an event as this. Some of the younger men tried with fun and jokes to raise the dismal tone of the conversation at first indulged in. They laughed, sang, drank, and played, and were the merrier as they believed it was for the last time they had met together in their favourite place of resort.

But fathers and sons kept at home with their own people. Now and then a friend or relation would look in, trying both to bring and carry away better cheer. Neighbours agreed to watch together; all the doors stood open, the windows were bright, the whole village presented a most unusual aspect.

After nightfall the fog cleared away, and the stars twinkled with uncommon brightness, as people thought, and many an anxiously inquiring glance was sent up towards them.

Blasl's house was one of the dullest on that night; the old miser could not, even on the brink of death, go to the expense of an extra candle. The lamp flickered dimly on the hearth. He kept his shutters closed, and only opened the door now and then, putting his head out to see whether Steffl was coming.

Steffl! his solace, his help, his comfort. He had kept up the old man's spirits by repeatedly assuring him that there was no comet coming. He had promised to keep watch with them through that anxious night. But he had only been with them for one minute in the morning, and had not returned.

At dusk Lenz had suddenly stood at Blasl's door. Maria gave a little shriek, and would have run to meet him, but Blasl stepped between the two lovers. "What dost thou want here?" he cried.

"I want to shake hands with you and Maria; it may be for the last time in this world, you know."

"Nonsense," cried Blasl, angrily; "thou art not on any pretence to come in or to speak to my daughter. Let me shut the door."

"Nay, Blasl," said the young man, "I have done nothing to forego your esteem. Why refuse me the little favour I ask for?"

"Get thee hence, I say!"

"You ought not to behave like that: it is a solemn night. Think of what may come!"

"I do not need thee to teach me what to think. I am master here, and I forbid thee to look at my daughter any longer. Away!"

"Nay, father," said Maria, gently pushing past him, "there is no harm in shaking hands with an old friend. Here is my hand, Lenz. Oh! if the world *would* but come to an end this night!"

Lenz's eyes filled with burning tears as he grasped her hand and looked close into her haggard, tearworn face. But old Blasl, exasperated, tore them asunder and banged the door in Lenz's face.

As the young man hastened away, not minding whither his steps led him, he met the schoolmaster.

"Do not go far away," said he, after having listened to Lenz's account of his visit to Blasl. "Keep in the neighbourhood. This is a strange night, and things may happen we are not looking for. Maria may have need of thee."

Blasl did not attempt to hide his disappointment on seeing the schoolmaster enter instead of the expected Steffl. But Herr Schmitt took no notice: he talked to the daughter, who sat weeping in the darkest corner of the room. Poor Maria began to rally by-and-by. After all everything was not lost: she was not Steffi's wife yet, and the comet might step between them for aught anyone could say. Steffl could not trouble her in the other world; she felt as sure of that as of being united to Lenz there. How she hoped and wished for the end of the world—surely the only one who did so!

Meanwhile her father kept running up and down, mumbling to himself in a wild incoherent way, opening and shutting the door a dozen times in succession. No Steffl came.

Other friends dropped in—not because they cared for Blasl, who had scorned their fear all the past anxious weeks—but on account of his daughter, whom they would not forsake in such an extremity.

Everybody agreed there was something wonderful in the appearance of the sky, although they could not explain what it was, and their definitions were contradictory. Fear magnified what they saw, and their imagination worked upon the least incident.

"Did you see that?"

"See what—what?"

"The shooting stars—quite a shower of stars. That must be the beginning of ——"

They pressed to the door. The schoolmaster took Maria near the window, and opened the shutter to see whether there would be any more falling stars. Blasl alone would not look out: he stood in the middle of the room, tearing his hair and crying for Steffl.

"Steffl?" said the last comer, "has he not been here? He left us at the inn hours ago, saying he was going to you. Where in the world can he be?"

"He had had several glasses of wine," said another; "but that couldn't have hurt him. He is used to more."

"Do you mean to say Steffl has not been seen since dusk?" enquired one, looking in through the window. "I think then he has left the village."

"Left the village!" shrieked Blasl. "You are mad, man; what can you mean?"

"I mean that at dusk I saw Steffl running on the highroad to W——. I wanted to stop him, but he would not hear. He yelled out something about the end of the world, and rushed on frantically. He scared me out of my wits: I was never so frightened in my life. The comet's advent couldn't startle me more."

"Steffl gone!" moaned Blasl, wringing his hands. "Steffl gone; and his treasure! Has he taken his treasure?"

They thought he was raving; and he, fearing he had said too much, stopped abruptly. He threw himself upon his bed, crying and groaning. Then wildly starting up, he wailed out, "Is it coming then, friends? is the end of the world coming?"

But they could not attend to him: they were much too busy in observing "something fiery" sweeping all across the sky.

"There—there!" They all left the room in a hurry, and even the schoolmaster followed, after having whispered a word in Maria's ear that made her heart beat high.

"Steffl, Steffl, thou hast forsaken me! What! have they all gone? Oh, my poor child, we shall die alone, forsaken by all the world!"

For the first time something like parental affection broke through the hard crust that had so long closed over the heart of the father.

"No, you are not alone," said the schoolmaster, re-entering with Lenz; "your friends are staying with you. If we must die, we will die together."

Blasl caught hold of their hands: it is hard to say whether in his agony he recognised Lenz or not. "Stop with me," he entreated; "midnight is coming on. Oh, do not forsake us!"

Just then the old clock in the corner struck a quarter to twelve, and the schoolmaster said solemnly, "Yes, Blasl, the hour is at hand; let us prepare for it. Blasl, there is little time left for you to make up for all the grief you caused your poor child!"

Blasl stared at him in bewilderment. "What can I do?"

"You will—won't you—give your daughter to this young man: she was and still is his promised wife, you know. Nothing could break their betrothal. Now, Blasl, say you will," added he, shaking him by the arm to wake him out of his state of torpor.

"No, I won't," said Blasl, sitting down upon his bed and folding his arms in a determined manner.

For some time the schoolmaster spoke to no purpose. At last he pointed to the clock: "One minute wanting; now, let us prepare for the awful moment. Blasl, will you?" But Blasl shook his head.

"You won't?—it's going to strike!"

The clock began, and up started Blasl, groping as if in darkness for the lovers' hands eagerly stretched out towards him. Joining them, he kept them in his grasp, calling out, "I've done it—done it, schoolmaster; you see I have done it. God will be merciful to me for their sakes."

"Declare," urged Herr Schmitt, "that you give your daughter Maria to Lorenz Steiner to wife."

"I do, I do!" cried Blasl, shaking with the fever of anguish, and tightening his iron grip over their united hands.

"And these our friends and neighbours are witnesses," said Herr Schmitt solemnly, turning to those who had re-entered the room.

"We are witnesses," echoed they.

"It is done," exclaimed the schoolmaster, with a sigh of relief, whilst Blasl sank back on his bed, covering his face with his hands to shut out the coming crash.

There was a solemn pause——

Nothing was to be heard—not a sound outside or inside the house for a long while. At last the peasants began to wonder amongst each other whether the clock could be right—whether midnight was past; but when the quarter struck they breathed more freely, and they gave expression to their opinion that the danger might be over. The comet might have passed the earth without touching it—they had all felt its presence; it must have passed very close to them; the earth had had a narrow escape!

Blasl raised his head and listened attentively to their words, which became more and more cheerful as the hand of the clock neared the half hour.

"Why are you two there together?" cried he suddenly, as his eye fell on the young people, who stood at the window hand in hand.

"Ho, ho!" said the schoolmaster, stepping between him and the pair; "these two belong to each other: you cannot part them any more; you have given your daughter to be the wife of Lenz Steiner."

"I have, have I?"

"You have," they all answered; "and we are witnesses thereto."

"Ah!" cried he, clapping his hands with a childish triumph, "I have not said a word about the money; she shan't have a penny!"

"Never mind," said Lenz, in happy tones, "Maria and I will work to live—won't we, Maria?—and never trouble you for money!"

"We will," replied Maria. "Be kind to us, father; give us your blessing instead of money!"

In the little hut in the wood two poor lonely women had also watched for the comet: Lisbeth and her aunt. For Lisbeth was not drowned. The wind had carried off her kerchief as she crossed the bridge, and must have blown it into the river. She had merely left the village, which had become hateful to her, and found service at some distant farm. But when the rumours of the comet and the end of the world reached her, she felt pangs of remorse for having left her kind old relative without any warning: she *must* go home to comfort her. And so it came to pass that Lisbeth walked towards A—— on the evening of the 12th of August, purposely choosing the time of dusk for her return.

She was shocked and frightened at the fog which stretched over the low-lying ground near the river, but rather glad of it still, for it would help her to escape notice. Having come half-way across the bridge, she heard another step coming towards her from the other end, and soon she saw a tall figure advancing which she at once

recognized to be—the very last person she would have wished to meet—Steffl! Tremblingly she leant against the railing, giving him room to pass on the narrow planks, but he, suddenly perceiving her close before him, white and motionless, veiled by the fog, was seized with the terror of guilt. He fell back, and with the shrill cry, “The dead are rising! the end of the world is surely coming!” he ran away as if chased by fiends; and was never seen again.

Neither Steffl nor the comet was heard of any more. Who knows whether the comet, on meeting the earth, was not equally shocked, and jumping out of his route went straying into space? At any rate, comet and Steffl had gone together, and no one wished for the return of either the one or the other.

After Steffl had been away for some time his room was opened. Blasl, who had hovered about it, *would* be present, but to his great astonishment no treasure could be found.

Three weeks after the terrible night the good old Pfarrer cried for joy when he married Lenz and Maria, who were both his special favourites. Maria *did* not carry a penny out of her father's house. She followed her husband to the farm, his present home, where she found employment amongst the women; it was not the life of a servant she led there, though; they all respected her as rich Blasl's daughter, and considered her volunteering in service a great condescension.

Two years passed. Old Blasl's life had become more and more secluded, until no one ever saw him leave his house during the day, but in the night he had taken to carrying his treasure from place to place all over his garden, unburying and reburying it constantly. There was but one thing dawning on his clouded mind: the wish to hide the money so well that even after his death it should not be found by any one.

When one day he suddenly died, the schoolmaster, who for Maria's sake had watched him, was able to show her, her husband, and the magistrates he had sent for, the place where he had seen him digging last. They found a vast amount of money—much more than they could have ever expected.

They bought land, and Lorenz works on it after the schoolmaster's precept, and is getting on to have a model farm. Children's voices now ring through the new house which Lenz and Maria built on the height opposite the church and the old Pfarrhaus.

MARIE ORM.

## THE ORKNEY AND SHETLAND ISLANDS.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND."



STREET IN KIRKWALL.

XCITEMENT does not seem to belong of right to Orkney: and any event disturbing the even tenour of its way appears out of place. Day succeeding day sees no change. The inhabitants live a life of peace and possess this charm: for the most part they know and are friendly with each other: one

large family or community with separate interests. Every day of the week is calm and uneventful; but the Sunday is most especially so. In Kirkwall will be found more churches and chapels than the visitor could reasonably expect. The United Presbyterians muster in the largest and most popular numbers. The Established Church of England is a small but somewhat tasteful building; and the service, all things considered, was particularly well performed. Even the Roman Catholics were last year building themselves a chapel.

Each of my Sundays in Kirkwall was signalled by magnificent weather. The island and the water came out in all their beauty of colouring. The hills around were almost grand in a quietness and repose, a glow of sunshine and purple air that seemed made to do honour to the Day of Rest. Turning your back upon the town, you might wander for many a mile into the country and meet no human being. The island might have been uninhabited. Here and there, at long intervals, through an open cottage door, would come a smell of burning peat; a delicious, homely aroma, suggestive of Sunday, because so pure and primitive; which becomes for ever associated with one's pleasanter recollections of these islands.

Returning into the town, the people were wending their way in twos and threes and half dozens to their respective churches: men and women in their best attire, worn with an air if not a grace suggestive of the words of the great preacher who declared that all is vanity. It seemed all day a perpetual going to church. The services were long, and in passing from the shorter Anglican service,

the psalm-singing proceeding from Scotch lungs, was a sufficient testimonial to the purity of Orkney air ; nowise lacking in energy, if it a little failed in harmony and melody.

But the Orcadians do not look upon themselves as Scotch. Like the Shetlanders, they are a race—almost a law—unto themselves : apart. It offends them mightily to be called or considered Scotchmen. They esteem themselves as something far better. This feeling is, perhaps, still more apparent in Shetland, where, if they wish to pay any one a bad compliment they liken him to a Scotchman. There is also rivalry and jealousy between the Orcadians and the Shetlanders ; and they would no more claim kindred and affinity with each other than with the despised Scotch, or the Great Mogul. "The Shetlanders are very different from you," I remarked to an Orcadian on my return from Shetland. "Oh, yes !" he replied, raising himself to his full proportions and tones : "we are so very much in advance of them." I was silenced, for, as far as the laws of good breeding permitted, I had desired to express a somewhat contrary opinion.

Finery, like flirting, is, I suppose, inherent in all the daughters of Eve ; whether these qualities are equally strong in the sons of Adam is not for these pages to determine. It was doubtless this love of finery that made the town of Kirkwall so much like a painted rainbow during the days of the Lammas fair. If it was curious to see the people arriving from the neighbouring isles, it was no less so to watch their departure when all was over ; the fun and the noise, the rough and ready love-making : until the return of another year. Boat after boat would put off, and sail out to sea with its heavy load, amidst laughter and commotion strangely out of keeping with the sober Scotch character. But it is a question, which may be asked by the way, how far the Scotch deserve their reputation for soberness and a phlegmatic temperament. I have seen more demonstrativeness in Scotland than in England : big, bearded men, on a railway platform, meet and embrace, and give each other the kiss of peace, like two gushing school-girls, where an Englishman would content himself with such a hand grasp as few but an Englishman know ought about.

The boats launching off with the visitors from the fair were of many sizes, but all crowded. Particularly so was the small steamer going to the North Isles. There was scarcely standing, certainly not moving room, on the decks fore and aft. Long after the removal of the gangway, tardy passengers were running down, and, leaping to the steamer, clung to the sides and climbed over, very much as a cat scrambles over a wall. Nuts and sweatmeats were pelted by the travellers at those on shore as parting benedictions ; and plenty of dry Scotch humour raised shouts of laughter. This was the very tail end of the fair ; and when the steamer had put off, looking dangerously loaded, all might be said to be over.

As with the coast of Great Britain, so it is with that of Orkney. The East coast, or the more protected, from the North Foreland to Caithness is more or less flat and unsheltered. Towards the west the coast gradually rises, and to the full force of the Atlantic presents a bold and mighty front. So in Orkney the east, or less exposed coast is flat and low, whilst in the west the highest hills are found.

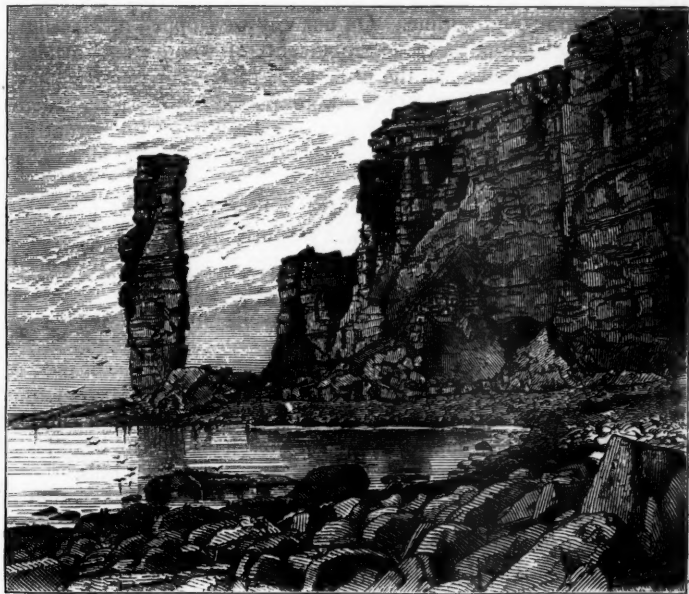
There are a good many birds in Orkney, but some, such as the golden eagle, have become rare. There is the peregrine falcon and the merlin. The rock-lark—a very different bird from the skylark—flits from rock to rock, and does not soar. When on the wing it has a sharp note without melody. There are sparrows that build in holes in the rocks, and old buildings, and the sides of houses that chance to possess ivy. Starlings are the most common of all birds. They go hopping about, with their yellow bills, and the air is sometimes almost black with them. War is not waged against the starlings. Like the swallow in France, and the redbreast in England, they are looked upon as almost sacred—sacred, at any rate, from the snare of the fowler. The raven is more common in Shetland. It is easily decoyed by its keen sense of smell : and is destructive to poultry and lambs. At one time the Commissioners of Supply gave three-and-sixpence for every eagle's head, fourpence for a raven, twopence for a crow. This ceased in 1835. Orkney also abounds in red grouse.

The heron may be seen selecting the lee side of the island. The curlew, or whaap, as they call it, is so shy that it is most difficult to shoot. The snipe makes its nest in the mossy banks of lakes and small running streams. There is the purple sandpiper, the landrail, or corncrake, which leaves in October and returns in April : the oystercatcher, lapwing, and golden plover. Wildgeese are rare. The sheldrake is not very common, and is hard to shoot. The beautiful great northern diver is sometimes seen, and also the redthroated diver. The black guillemot, or tystie, is common, and makes its nest in holes under the stones and in fissures of the rocks. The young never leave the nest until perfectly fledged and able to take care of themselves. The puffin is also common, with its curious parrot-bill. Gulls and cormorants abound. The gull, as well as being watchman to the cormorant, is of great service to the seals, who lie for hours upon the rocks. At the approach of danger the gull sounds a note of alarm, will strike the seal on the head with its feet, and when the seal retires into the water, if he appears again in danger, will dart down and splash water into his face. The stormy petrel, or mother Carey's chicken, is the smallest of the web-footed tribe.

The flight of birds suggests, also, that with the end of the fair, though not because of it, came the time for my own flight from Orkney. But it was impossible to leave without making an attempt to visit the Island of Hoy : an attempt more often than not frustrated by the weather. Here storms arise without warning, and waves roll along with mighty speed and break over the shores, and forbid any

effort to land. The strong currents of the narrow Pentland Firth sweep down with amazing force, and a very little encouragement on the part of the wind will turn the swell that is never absent into a heavy sea.

Scott has thrown his spell over the islands. To the minds of all who love him he is inseparable from Orkney and Shetland, when they happen to visit either Archipelago. He charmed whatever he touched, and it was changed henceforth and for ever. All the weirdness, the supernatural element, the beauties of description, both of character and nature, as found in the "Pirate": all this lays hold of



THE OLD MAN OF HOY.

the imagination, and will not let it go again, and casts its halo over seas and islands. You see Norna in the dim twilight haunting the precincts of the cathedral, disappearing under dim arches and through secret passages, and reappearing upon the bold summit of every hill and rock. You hear the laughter and the tears of the lovely and loveable daughters of the ancient Udaller; phantom vessels upon the water seem to hold the figure of the bold pirate himself; over moors and downs you perceive the ludicrous figure of Triptolemus Yellowley ambling along in fear and trembling for his craven life.

One of the chief attractions connected with the "Pirate" is the Island of Hoy, with its Dwarfie Stone. It would not be too much to assert that Scott has sent more people here than all the reputation

the stone ever enjoyed apart from his descriptions. Thus I started one morning from Kirkwall for Stromness, in a conveyance very much resembling a dog-cart. As fate would have it, it happened to be the annual fair at Stromness, and it was by the merest chance that I found anything at liberty to take me. The drive of fifteen miles was by no means unpleasant. The road was hard and white, and a capital horse carried us at a good round speed. Now and again a carrion crow, cruel and destructive, would fly across our path, and with a hoarse croak seemed to bid us defiance. The hills were round and about us—the highest in the group of islands: those of Hoy—ahead of us: and with every turn of the road seemed to change in form and outline. On our way we stopped at Maeshowe and the Standing Stones, those monuments of wonder and mystery. Approaching Stromness, all the usual signs of the fair were visible on the outskirts of the town. These were passed rapidly; we entered the narrow, tortuous street, and finally came to an anchor at the hospitable doors of Mrs. Scott's hotel. There is not a more comfortable inn in Orkney than this.

Stromness is now in some senses a more important town than Kirkwall, though when Kirkwall was a flourishing capital Stromness could boast of no existence. Subsequently it struggled into life as the scene of a few small fishermen's cottages on the shore. Most picturesque is the situation of Stromness; far more so than Kirkwall. The town consists of one long, crooked, straggling street. Through openings you may here and there catch a glimpse of the bay, and the land, that, stretching out into the sea like tongues, form a natural harbour: but as a rule you walk through the town and see nothing but the straggling houses on either hand. The beauties of the place can only be seen out on the water or upon the hills.

The aspect of the town is much more commonplace than that of Kirkwall, in spite of the ugliness of the latter. Kirkwall, in a quiet, unconscious manner, imparts to the mind a sense of fitness with its surroundings. It is exactly what might be expected in an out-of-the-world place boasting a cathedral of seven or eight centuries, and a record of eighteen hundred years. Stromness, on the contrary, has newer and more modern buildings, destitute of the smallest beauty. The eye is shocked, when out on the water, by a new-looking chapel or town hall, standing out on the hills, prominent as the eye of an Argus. But most of the houses are built of the ordinary and inevitable grey stone, peculiar to these towns and to many towns in Scotland: houses that, seen for the first time, strike the beholder with an unpleasant chill, dreary and desolate: as the smoke-begrimed houses of London appear to anyone who has lived his life amidst smiling plains and sunny hills: dreariness to which the eye and the imagination never grow accustomed.

But in the beauty of its site, Stromness bears the palm over Kirkwall. The hills behind and around the town; the rising

ground stretching out on either hand, and forming a natural and picturesque harbour; the holms upon the water, here and there raising their rocky heads; the towering hills—towering for Orkney—of the neighbouring Island of Hoy; the transparency and beauty of the water itself: these features, together with the comfortable quarters of Mrs. Scott's inn, combine to make Stromness one of the most pleasant resting places in the Archipelago.

The town owes much of its importance to the fact of its being the nearest point to the mainland of Scotland. Between this and Thurso the little mail steamer takes its daily passage across the Pentland Firth. And woe betide those who are bold enough to cross in rough weather. The crossing is always more or less severe; but there are times, not few and far between, when the little steamer rolls and pitches like a shell upon the ocean, and the passage of less than two hours seems as many days.

Yet it must be taken by those who wish to see the best and boldest rock scenery that Orkney can produce: the high cliffs of Hoy. I had heard a great deal of these rocks; every one spoke of their extreme grandeur and magnificence. I confess to a feeling of disappointment. They possess the misfortune of an exaggerated reputation, which diminishes their effect upon the mind prepared for greater things. A prominent, long, upright column of rock, called the Old Man of Hoy, has become detached in the course of ages from the maincliff, and stands out like a warning to mariners. Years ago it was much higher and grander than it is now; but the soft, crumbling, red stone is yielding to the effects of time. Each year diminishes the stature of the venerable giant.

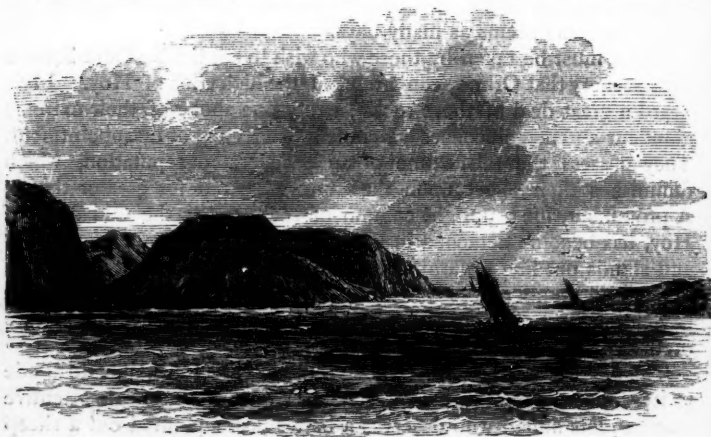
The day I crossed over to Thurso—though it is forestalling to allude to it—the captain of the mail steamer: one of the most attentive commanders afloat, who deserves a better post: pointed out a sheep on one of the highest and almost perpendicular rocks. Years ago a small flock of sheep one certain night in some way got far down this rock. There was no means of getting them back again, or of landing them at the bottom. Grass grew upon the ledge and in the crevices they had reached. Upon this they subsisted, a little colony to themselves, in view of, yet separated from the world. As time went on, one after another died, and now there is but one remaining. It was early morning when we passed, and the little animal was lying stretched upon the cliff, fast asleep.

It was at Stromness that Scott met an old woman named Bessie Miller, from whom he is said to have taken his idea of Norna. But there is very little resemblance between the common-place dame of Stromness and the grand, dignified, and imaginative character of Norna. Bessie Miller was a little, shrivelled up, brown old creature, said to have lived a century, wrinkled and haggard. She gained a livelihood by selling fair winds to sailors, and charged sixpence apiece for boiling her kettle. Not one of them would sail, it is said, without pro-

pitiatting Bessie with an offering. Perhaps she did not gain it altogether dishonestly ; for all she promised was, that if they waited long enough for the wind it would be sure to come.

The day I visited Stromness it was full of the unpleasant noise and bustle of the fair. The inevitable Scotch drovers abounded. So when the slight but necessary duty of lunch was over, I was glad to secure a trusty boatman, leave the town to its noise and its worry, and sail over to Hoy. This can only be done in fine weather, and luckily the day was bright and sunny, and the water calm. Yet storms arise so suddenly that it is possible to leave Stromness in smooth water, and reach Hoy in a sea that will not permit you to land.

The boatman hoisted his sail, and we launched forth upon the

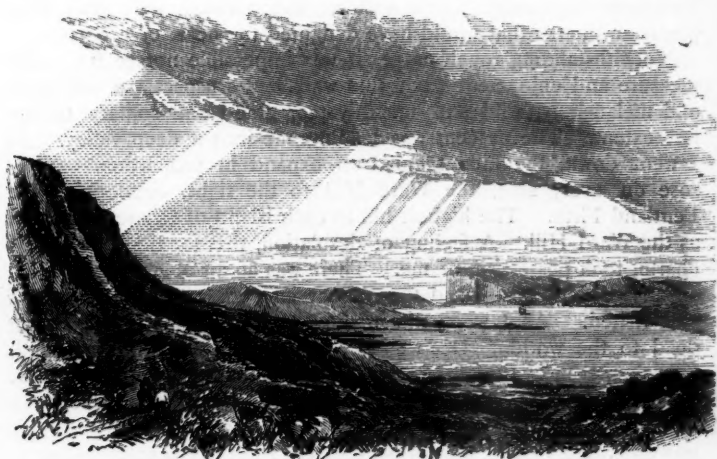


Hoy.

clear water. We steered free of the rocks and gradually got into the more open sea. The run across to Hoy was only two miles, but the currents are so strong and the difficulties of landing so great, that with the slightest contrary wind the two miles will become, in the matter of distance, an unknown quantity. As we receded from the town, the beauty of its position became more marked and striking. Beyond, to the right, rounding Dunnet Head, the passage opened leading to the Pentland Firth and across to Scotland. Before us rose the hills of Hoy, grand and almost majestic, and suggestive of the utmost solitude. The commencement of the fine rock scenery might be noted, but the greater portion of it lay on the opposite side. As we made way a breeze began to spring up, and a swell upon the water. The place the old boatman had singled out for landing could no longer be attempted.

He was an intelligent old man ; and yet not old, for he was still in

his prime. He had been a sailor in his day, and gone to many parts of the world. The trip was shortened by some of his past adventures. How they had once left Liverpool in a ship the owners knew to be unseaworthy. How the ship and cargo had been insured beyond their full value, but the lives of the men had not been reckoned in the bargain. How at the end of two days she was making more water than they could possibly pump out. How the captain ill-treated them, and would not put back. How they held a council, took the captain and confined him, and brought the ship home again : and how in the end they were acquitted with flying colours. Then he went out to the gold fields, but met with small luck ; and pining for a sight of home made a mistake and returned. He lived now by his boat, and kept a wife and bairn. He and his



LOOKING OUT FROM HOY, DUNNET HEAD IN THE DISTANCE.

mate had a couple of boats between them : they often went out fishing at night, and looked to visitors to employ them by day.

All this time he was keeping his eye upon the landing-place ; now tacking, now slackening, now tightening the sheet in answer to the wind ; so at last we reached Hoy. We did not land without difficulty. At length the boat was sufficiently high and dry upon the shingle, and was further secured by a rope. As we went up the winding path, a little old woman met us, and asked if we had seen anything of her brother. She was standing knitting, and looking over the water towards Stromness. Her brother had gone to the fair, and she was getting anxious about him. She lived in the solitary little cottage which formed a background to her quaint figure ; whilst the blue peat smoke curled up out of the chimney, and lost itself in the pure air.

We went on, and the boatman accompanied me part of the way to the Dwarfie Stone, without which help he said it would be difficult to find the road. It was a tough walk of two miles. Tough indeed. The hardest walk imaginable. It began with an ascent for a considerable distance. The ground was rough, heavy, and uneven: covered with furze, which frequently concealed hidden marshes. At the top of the hill the guide pointed out the direction, and then went back to his boat. The tide was rising, and he dare not leave it to its tender mercies. It was still harder to go down hill than it had been to get up. The uneven ground was so overgrown with furze, and moss, and heather, that all hollows and inequalities were but too well concealed. It was a series of plunges into holes, that shook one from head to foot, and occasionally varied the performance by a headlong tumble to the ground: many wild flowers abounded, plants and herbs that would have delighted the heart of a botanist.

Notwithstanding rough usage, it was impossible not to find great pleasure and enjoyment from this walk. Its aspect was mournful and melancholy, wild and uncultivated, grand and solitary to the last extent. The descent was leading me into a deep valley. As I went down, the hills seemed to expand in proportion. They rose on every side, the Ward Hill to the right, overlooking the Pentland Firth. The highest hill in each island of Orkney is known as the Ward Hill. A feeling of desolation, that for the time has its charm, took possession of me. There was an air of greater size and expanse about this island than about any other part of Orkney I had visited. As I went, the momentary feeling was one of being dead to the world. Deep silence reigned throughout the island, unbroken even by the cry of a bird. Eagles, that once here abounded, did not make the silence and solitude seem more palpable by a flight across the valleys far away into the clouds. No sign of life was anywhere visible; no living creature; not the faintest vestige of a hut or cottage. Not the trace of a human foot. To all intents and purposes this lonely spot might never have been visited by man.

But as I went, the figure of Scott would creep up into the imagination, and haunt the very air. The mind would recur again and again to the *Pirate*, its weird scenes and strange characters. And, coming in sight of the Dwarfie Stone, there upon it distinctly sat the ghost of Norna, holding commune with the mountains, and working her spells. To crown all, the day had changed, suddenly as it does change in these latitudes. Dark, sombre clouds had overshadowed the blue sky; an unpleasant, drizzling mist had begun to fall. This increased tenfold the dreariness of the general aspect, and took not a little from the pleasure of the excursion.

At length I reached the stone. My first thoughts were: "So far for so little!" What had I expected to see? I scarcely know: and if there was a feeling of disappointment it had no business there. A long hollow block of stone, lying in the valley between the hills,

where the ground began to rise. Of course I crept in, probably like every other foolish person who has visited the spot. It was divided into two compartments—one on either side the narrow passage that gave entrance to the interior. Both divisions are small, and admit you only in a recumbent, cramped up position. Yet, says tradition, the stone was once the abode of *a giant and his wife*. Another legend declares that it was once inhabited by a hermit. This might be possible, yet there is little trace of its ever having fulfilled such a destiny. A foot or two in front of the opening is a large stone, said once to have formed the door of the passage, but too heavy to be lifted by human hands. It is certainly a mystery how the Dwarfie Stone came to occupy its present position. A fragment of rock, perhaps, that once rolled down from the mountain, and its place, in course of time grown over with grass and furze, knew it no more. No matter how, it is certainly a mystery. Its hollowness seems to have been the result of thought and plan, not of accident; the work of man, and not of time.

Time, however, is diminishing its attractions. The stone, of soft material, is yielding gradually to the action of the elements. Though the destructive hands of tourists should spare it, these will have no mercy. Portions ready to fall crumbled to the touch, and many fragments were lying about. In the days when Scott saw it, it must have been very much larger than it is now. The hole in the roof, too, for this reason, is much larger than it once was. This is said to have been the chimney that let out the hermit's smoke.

I did what I certainly had never done before—crept out the house by the chimney, sat down to rest upon the stone, and thought of Norna. It seems to have been placed here to suit her plans and purposes. Her words are worth quoting, even though the reader may be familiar with them:—

“But for my misfortune, I was chiefly fond to linger about the Dwarfie Stone, as it is called, a relique of antiquity, which strangers look on with curiosity, and the natives with awe. It is a huge fragment of a rock, which lies in a broken and rude valley, full of stones and precipices, in the recesses of the Ward Hill of Hoy. The inside of the stone has two couches, hewn by no earthly hand, and having a small passage between them. The doorway is now open to the weather; but beside it lies the huge stone, which, adapted to grooves, still visible in the entrance, once had served to open and to close this extraordinary dwelling, which Trolld, a dwarf famous in the Northern Sagas, is said to have framed for his own favourite residence. The lonely shepherd avoids the place, for at sunrise, high noon, or sunset, the misshapen form of the necromantic owner may sometimes still be seen sitting by the Dwarfie Stone. I feared not the apparition, for, Minna, my heart was as bold, and my hand was as innocent, as yours. . . . Often when watching by the Dwarfie Stone, with mine eyes fixed on the Ward Hill which rises above that gloomy valley, I have

distinguished, among the dark rocks, that wonderful carbuncle, which gleams ruddy as a furnace to them who view it from beneath, but has ever become invisible to him whose daring foot has scaled the precipices from which it darts its splendour. My vain and youthful bosom burned to investigate these and an hundred other mysteries, which the Sagas that I perused, or learned from Erlend, rather indicated than explained; and in my daring mood, I called on the lord of the Dwarfie Stone to aid me in attaining knowledge inaccessible to mere mortals."

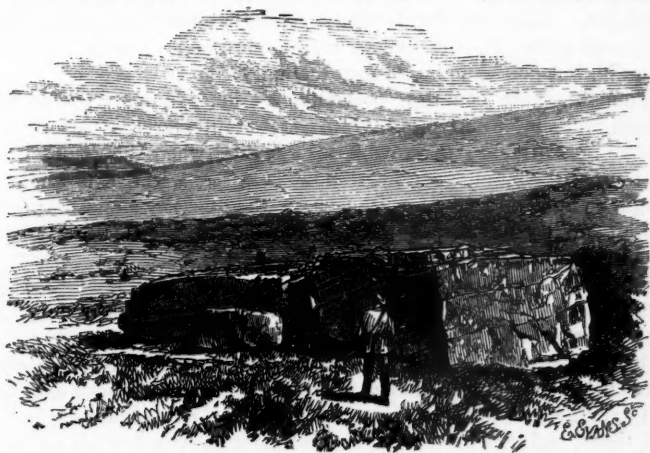
A footnote adds these words: Dr. Wallace gave the following account of this curiosity: "There is in Hoy, lying betwixt two hills, a stone called the Dwarfie Stone, which is one entire rock, thirty-six feet long, eighteen feet broad, nine feet thick, hollowed within by the hands of some mason (for the print of the irons are to be seen on it to this day), with a square hole of about two feet high for the entry, and a stone proportionable standing before it for a door. Within, at one end, is a bed, excellently cut out of the stone, wherein two men may lie together, at their full length; at the other end is a couch, and in the middle, a hearth for a fire, with a hole cut above for the chimney. It is thought to have been the residence of some melancholy hermit."

This description is much exaggerated. It could never have held two men at full length, though one "melancholy hermit" might possibly have screwed himself into the hole. The same cause that is lessening the stone is also increasing the cavity, and it is beyond the power, even now, of anyone save a dwarf, to repose on this soft "couch" at full length. The quotation continues:—

"At the west end of this stone stands an exceeding high mountain of a steep ascent, called the Wart Hill of Hoy, near the top of which, in the months of May, June, and July, about midnight is seen something that shines and sparkles admirably, and which is often seen a great way off. It hath shined more brightly before than it does now; and though many have climbed up the hill, and attempted to search for it, yet they could find nothing."

Thus for Norna's sake the stone is worth visiting, if not for its own. The island itself will amply repay the trouble of getting to it. Yet the walk back from the Dwarfie Stone was more troublesome than the walk there had been. There was more climbing, and, somehow, more stumbling into pitfalls and marshes. I steered my way by means of a small compass, and so reached the shore and the boat in less time, said the boatman, than he had ever known it done. But I was tolerably knocked up, and at the moment promised it should be my first and last visit to the Dwarfie Stone. The old woman was still looking out over the water, knitting and watching for her brother. If we saw him, would we hurry him home? He was all she had, and she felt lonely without him. Well she might, indeed, in that desolate spot.

We put off in what the boatman called dirty-looking weather. The wind was blowing unmistakably, and against us ; therefore we had to tack. The sea also had risen, and we shipped much more than was convenient or comfortable. Every now and then a squall came up, and for about five minutes we would be deluged with rain, and tossed about by a wind that was half a gale. Then it would pass over, and leave us in tolerable peace until the next squall came up. It was bitterly cold and wretchedly unpleasant. We were a long time getting back. I was not sorry to find myself at last inside the land, and in the smooth water of the bay. Here we lost the wind. So down went the sail, and we took to the oars, and shot past the holms, up to the landing-stage. Thus ended my trip to Hoy : more pleasantly



THE DWARFIE STONE.

than if the wind had been a little higher, and the sea a little rougher, and we had taken a cold plunge into the rapid currents.

And here, reader, we will take our farewell of Orkney. He who goes thither must expect to rough it to some extent ; but it has its compensations. A good deal may be said in favour of the islands and the people : more, probably, than I was able to discover in a short and not very toward sojourn : for with the exception of about three days, it rained almost incessantly during my stay in Kirkwall. But that I had taken with me a task that had to be completed, a very few days would have seen me on my way to the more northern of the two archipelagos.

A few words about Shetland, bright, pleasant Shetland, and then farewell to these latitudes.

## MARGERY FENNELL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT."

TEN o'clock striking by the little Dutch clock in the corner, and George Fennell not yet at home.

Margery Fennell was used to her father's absence of an evening—had been used to it all her life; but whenever ten o'clock struck without bringing him home, she could not help feeling restless and uneasy. She knew then where he was to be found, and in what condition. Either at the Leyburne Arms, at the upper end of the village, or at the Two Travellers, at the lower end, and in a state of maudlin, but good-humoured intoxication.

To-night, as on countless previous occasions, Margery put on her bonnet and shawl, and prepared to set out in search of her father. George never refused to go with his daughter when she found him. "I must bid you all good-night now, lads," he would say, when he caught sight of Margery's white face in the doorway: and he would accompany her home. How hateful such quests were to Margery no one but herself could have told.

George Fennell was a ganger on the neighbouring railway. He had a number of men to work under him, and it was his duty to keep a certain length of line under constant supervision and repair. Although a man of very limited education, he was shrewd and capable at his work, and earned enough wages to have kept himself and his two daughters in humble plenty, and to have put something by for bad times, had it not been for his fatal habit of spending his earnings at the public-house.

Before setting out to-night, Margery took off the fire the savoury little stew which was cooking for her father's supper, and put it to simmer on the hob. Then she blew out the end of candle, and lighted a fresh one, for although Bella was now to all appearance fast asleep, she might wake up before her sister got back, and be frightened at finding herself alone in the dark.

It was from this Bella, this little sister now eight years old, that Margery drew at once the sweetness and the sorrow of her life. The sweetness came to her through the intense, yearning love she bore the motherless child. The sorrow came to her because through her the child's life had been blighted.

One day when Bella was not quite a year old, and a few months before Mrs. Fennell died, the latter sent Margery to fetch some milk, and told her to take the baby with her. Margery went, but the day was frosty, and the roads slippery, and on her way back she fell. She herself was uninjured, but Bella's spine was hurt by the fall, and she

had been a cripple from that day to this: and a cripple, the village doctor averred, she would remain as long as she lived. She could walk, but only with the aid of crutches, and a few steps at a time. She loved best to lie in the big old-fashioned clothes-basket, that had been fitted up for her as a movable bed—out under the lilac bush on sunny days, and in the warmest nook of the hearth when the weather was wet or cold. A silent child mostly, with large patient eyes, who would lie for hours together twining and untwining her long thin fingers, thinking her own thoughts, while she watched the shadows flung on wall and ceiling, or the sunbeams slowly slide from brick to brick of the cottage floor. Her dearest delight was to get her sister to read to her of an evening, when the housework was done, and before George Fennell got home; and, thanks to the kindness of several ladies in the village, Margery was kept well supplied with books. Who can tell Margery's anguish of heart, or the daily martyrdom she underwent when she saw what her sister was, and thought of all she might have been but for that unlucky fall! Day and night she blamed herself for not having been more careful, and vowed that while she lived nothing on earth should come between her and her devotion to the crippled child.

Margery gave a last look round, and then stooped to kiss the sleeping child. The touch of her lips, light as it was, sufficed to wake Bella.

"Are you going to look for father?" she asked, when she saw Margery's bonnet and shawl.

Margery nodded. "I shall not be long away," she replied.

"I will keep house till you come back, and the clock shall keep me company," said Bella. "You can't fancy what strange things it says to me sometimes, when we are by ourselves. It says nothing but tick-tack when anybody else is by, but when we are alone every tick-tack changes into a word, and I ask it questions about fairies and giants, and the little men who live inside the hills. And sometimes all at once it calls out gur-r-r-r. That is its way of laughing, and then I laugh too. Oh, I shan't be a bit lonely while you are gone."

Margery kissed the thin, pale face again, and then went swiftly out, and shut the door behind her. She remembered with a pang what Mrs. Mallott, a neighbour, had said more than once: "That child's too old-fashioned for this world." Then she thought of her father, and life felt very bitter.

She paused for a moment to pin her worn shawl more closely round her throat, for the September night was chilly, and then she set out at a swift pace up the straggling village street in the direction of the Leyburne Arms. Most of the villagers, having to rise betimes, were already abed, but here and there a solitary light shone cheerfully, and showed that others than herself were still awake. They were just preparing to close the Leyburne Arms when she reached it. The landlady was standing in the doorway, taking in "a mouthful of

fresh air," as she called it: rather a needful process considering the state of the atmosphere indoors.

"Is father here?" asked Margery, almost out of breath, so quickly had she come.

"Bless your heart, no, dearie. He left here almost an hour ago," said the landlady. "He was a little bit so-so, but knew well enough what he was about."

"Thank you. Good night," said Margery, and away she sped back into the darkness.

"What a fine girl that do get," muttered the landlady. "There's a look in them grey eyes of hers that I never noticed in anybody else's. It's a burning shame that George Fennell don't look more after her and his home." She never thought, or never cared to remember, how much both of his time and money George Fennell spent under her own roof.

Not finding her father at the Leyburne Arms, Margery's mind jumped at once to the conclusion that he must have walked past his own door and have gone as far as the Two Travellers at the opposite end of the village. More than once before he had done the same thing. Almost at a run, Margery sped back through the village, and taking a foot-path through the churchyard, which cut off a bend of the road, she found herself in a very few minutes at the door of the Two Travellers. With a little sinking of the heart, she saw that all was dark and silent. Not a light, not a sound anywhere. The inmates were already in bed. Where could her father be?

Margery stood for a moment to think. She could call to mind but one other place where there was any likelihood that her father might be found, and that was the lodgings of Black Dick. Her father had been there twice previously, and there was just a possibility that he might be there again to-night. The thought had hardly formed itself in her mind before she was on her way to Black Dick's.

The owner of the above unenviable sobriquet had appeared in Cheverton one day, coming from nobody knew where, and, seeking out George Fennell, had demanded rather than asked for work. He knew nothing of railway work, he said, but he had been in Australia, and he could handle a spade and pick as well as most men. George Fennell took to the man and found him work. That was six months ago. "He's a rare scholar," said George, "and a chap that's seen better days." He gave George an occasional cake of strong tobacco, and thereby kept in his good graces. Where he got the tobacco from he never condescended to explain, but George firmly believed it to have been smuggled, and enjoyed it all the more on that account. If there was one person in the world that Margery Fennell disliked more than another, that person was Black Dick. Whenever they met, and it was only by accident when they did, for Margery would go a mile out of her way rather than run the slightest risk of

encountering him, there came a look into his fierce black eyes that made her heart shrink within her. Nothing but the strong necessity there was upon her of finding her father would have taken her near Black Dick's cottage to-night.

Dick lodged in a lonely little cottage up a side lane that opened out of the main street. The cottage belonged to a deaf old woman of the name of Moore—a widow. Mrs. Moore and her cottage were well known to Margery, who, as a child, had stayed there once for a month when her mother had been called away to nurse a dying sister.

As Margery turned out of the village street into the lane she slackened her pace and went more cautiously. But not a soul did she meet. When she came in sight of the cottage, it looked as dark and silent as the Two Travellers had looked, but Margery knew that Black Dick's room was at the back of the house, and that she should have to go round through the little paddock before she could make sure that all was dark on that side. She was on the point of turning off the foot-path and crossing the stile when she caught sight of some unfamiliar object between herself and the cottage. Venturing forward, step by step, she made out in a little while that the object in question was neither more nor less than a light country trap with a horse between the shafts. It was evident that there was company at the cottage to-night, and no doubt her father was there among the rest.

Retracing her steps a little way, she crossed the stile, and took the foot-path through the paddock, which brought her to a little wicket that opened into the orchard at the back of the cottage. Yes—there was a light shining through the chinks of the shutters of Black Dick's room. Step by step she drew nearer, but she trod very cautiously now. Not for the world would she have Black Dick know she was there. All that she could do was to wait patiently till her father should leave the cottage, then catch him up when he had gone a little way, and conduct him safely home.

When as near the cottage as she deemed it safe to venture, Margery took her stand in the deep shade of an apple tree, and made up her mind to wait there. But suddenly a sound of voices from the inside of the cottage fell on her ears. This struck her with a little surprise, because the voices did not sound like those of men who had grown noisy over their cups, but rather like the voices of men in deep and earnest conversation. Quitting her hiding place, and stepping lightly through the thick grass, she slowly drew nearer to the cottage, but ready to fly at the slightest indication that the party was about to break up. Then she saw how it came about that she had heard the voices so plainly. Although the shutters had been closed inside the room, the sash of the window, which had doubtless been pushed up on account of the warm afternoon, had not been drawn down again. The shutters were old and warped. The

light escaped through them here and there, and through them came the sound of voices that Margery had heard.

Perchance, if she durst venture close to the window, she might be able to satisfy herself whether her father were in the room or not. Anxiety and curiosity emboldened her. With her heart all a-flutter, but with no more noise than a mouse might have made, she crept inch by inch nearer the window. She reached it at last. Then she was obliged to pause and hush her breathing before she durst venture to look or listen.

Half a minute later, with her hand pressed to her bosom; she was peering through the crevice in the shutters, all her senses preternaturally on the alert. What she saw seemed to her, and in such a place as that, a strange sight indeed. Round a common deal table sat four men in close and earnest conversation. Three of them were strangers to her: the fourth was Black Dick. On the table were a lighted candle and a bottle of spirits, with glasses and a jug of water. Nowhere could Margery see her father. She looked and listened, but her interest in the scene was gone, and what they were talking about evidently was no business of hers. But suddenly one of the men took a pistol out of his pocket, and began to examine it, as if to make sure that it was in proper order. It was a pistol with several barrels, such as she had never seen before; and then she saw that there were others like it on a side-table. Then a name spoken by Black Dick struck on her ear—a name with which she was familiar—that of James Clinch, the signalman at Ottergate Junction.

"I tell you again," said Dick, emphasising his words with a blow of his fist on the table, "that the train never passes the junction before thirty-five after eleven. I've timed her myself every night for a week. Two of us can manage Clinch. The other two must keep out of sight till they are wanted."

Then the other men joined in, and the talk grew more animated. Margery listened as she had never listened before. No thought, now, of running away. Even her anxiety about her father was forgotten for a little while. For full ten minutes she stood there with her ear close to the shutter. Then she had heard enough—enough to daze her, to confound her, to make her ask herself in blank despair what it was that she ought to do. Suddenly the meeting broke up, and almost before Margery knew what had happened, the door was opened and the four men came out. It was too late to run back to the shelter of the apple tree. Fortunately, within a few feet of the window there was a large butt placed to catch the rain-water. Margery slipped round to the other side of this, and, drawing the skirt of her black dress over her head, she crouched between the butt and the wall, and waited in mortal dread for what might happen next.

The men stood talking for a minute or two at the door, but their voices now were more subdued, as if they were afraid of being over-

heard by any chance passer-by. Then Black Dick came round the corner of the house and pulled down the window sash. Poor Margery, in her hiding-place, felt as if her heart grew white with terror while he was so close to her. But he went back without suspecting anything, and presently all four men got into the trap and drove quickly away. Then Margery stood up and put down the skirt of her dress, and listened to the noise of the retreating wheels. Yes—it was as she thought. On reaching the end of the lane they had turned to the right and taken the road that led to Ottergate Junction. What ought she to do?—what, indeed, could she do? Even if she were to run across the fields with all her speed, the distance to Ottergate was a good two miles, and the men would be there long before her, and thus render it impossible for her to warn James Clinch in time. Poor James! She liked his pleasant face and cheery laugh. She sometimes wondered why he so often went round by her father's cottage on his long walk to and from his signal-box, when his nearest way was through Noman's Lane. If she could but have warned him! Even while this thought was in her mind, she set off running in the direction of home. If only her father had got back, she would tell him what she had heard. Surely the news would be enough to sober him; and then he would decide what ought to be done. The dear, familiar light at last! She opened the door softly, and went in. Her heart sank within her. There were no signs of George Fennell. Everything was as she had left it, except that her sister was asleep, and that the fire had burnt itself down to a few glowing ashes. What could have befallen her father? Could he have gone round and called up his men, as he had done one midnight not long ago, when under the influence of drink, vowing that it was six o'clock, and time to go to work? But she had hardly time to think of her father under the sense of this other responsibility, which weighed upon her with tenfold force, now that she recognised how utterly alone she was. As she hurried through the village this last time not a single light was to be seen. Everybody was in bed. Somewhere, no doubt, she might have found Ragg, the constable—the only constable of which Cheverton could boast—but he was partially deaf, and infirm with rheumatism, and while she was finding him and telling her tale the precious moments would slip away, and the possibility of doing anything would be lost for ever. If anything was to be done, it must be done at once. The mail would reach Ottergate Junction at eleven thirty-five, and even while Margery was standing there with despairing heart and dizzy brain, the little Dutch clock struck eleven. What, oh, what could she do? she asked herself with a little sob: she, an ignorant, helpless, country girl.

Suddenly, as though it were a flash of inspiration, a thought came into her brain that almost stunned her for a moment. "If I could but do it!" she said aloud. She pressed her fingers to her eyes for half a minute, so as to think out more clearly the scheme that had

were suddenly revealed to her. Then she hesitated no longer. She would try it: she could but fail.

The first thing she did was to tie the ends of her shawl in a knot at the back of her waist, so as to leave greater freedom of movement for her arms. Then she took her father's lamp—the one he used on the line when out at night, and carefully trimmed and lighted it as she had done a hundred times before. Then she took down from its nail a small rush basket in which her father used sometimes to carry his breakfast or dinner. Into this she put six fog signals, taking them out of the box behind the pantry door where a stock of them was always kept in case of need. For it was part of George Fennell's duty during the foggy nights of autumn and winter, when the ordinary signals could not be seen, to summon certain of the platelayers who worked under him, and having given each of them a supply of fog signals, to station them at various points of the line, in order that the trains, both up and down, might be warned in time that they were approaching the junction: and Margery herself had more than once helped to fix the signals when her father happened to be short of men.

She was now ready to set out. A last look at her sleeping sister before she issued into the darkness, then shutting the door softly behind her, away she sped as if for dear life. The object she had in view was to stop the mail train before it could reach Ottergate Junction. In order to do this she must, first of all, get on to the line of railway, which, at its nearest point, was quite three-quarters of a mile from George Fennell's cottage. Margery had the advantage of knowing every inch of the way, and she sped fleetly along, although somewhat impeded by the lamp and the basket, crossing the dark and lonely uplands without any fear at her heart, save that of the being too late to accomplish what she had set herself to do. A quarter past eleven chimed from Squire Grayson's stable clock as she passed the last house between herself and the railway. If only the train were five minutes late to-night, as it sometimes was, then all would be well.

Cheverton in those days was not thought of sufficient importance to have a railway station to itself. The nearest station was at Bickmore, a town of some importance, five miles away. But between Bickmore and Cheverton, about three miles from the former and two miles from the latter, was Ottergate Junction, at which point the line divided itself into two, the main branch keeping on for Bickmore and other places further north, while a shorter branch to the left gave access to several important collieries and a few villages chiefly inhabited by miners. It was necessary to have a man on duty at the Junction by night as well as day, seeing that three or four long mineral trains had to be despatched during the dark hours on their journey southward. The line to Bickmore was merely a branch from a great trunk line some

twenty miles away. Consequently the train which Margery hoped to intercept was only an offshoot of the London mail, bringing with it the letter-bags for a few remote inland towns and such far-between passengers as business or pleasure induced to travel by night.

At length the last field was crossed, the last hedge scrambled through, and Margery Fennell found herself on the railway. Her first act was to kneel and place her ear close to the rail. She knew that by doing so the noise made by an approaching train could be heard sooner than in any other way.

As yet Margery heard nothing. As nearly as she could calculate, she was a little more than a mile south of Ottergate. She must get still farther away if possible, so as to give the train time to pull up before running too close to the Junction. First seeing that her lamp was all right, and turning on the red slide, she started at a quick pace along the narrow trodden path between the up and down lines, known technically as "the six foot." When she had gone about fifty yards she halted, and opening her basket, took out of it one of the fog signals. This, stooping on one knee, she proceeded to fix on one of the rails, by turning down and bending under it the two flanges provided for that purpose. Then, having run twenty yards farther, she proceeded to fix another signal, and twenty yards farther another. By this time the noise of the oncoming train was clearly audible. When she had fixed a fourth signal she knew that it was necessary to hurry back. Leaving her basket with the remaining signals, but holding fast to her lamp, she ran fleetly along the "six foot" till she reached a point about a hundred yards nearer the Junction than the first signal she had put down. Then she turned and waited. By this time the pulsations of the train were becoming louder with every moment. Margery's heart seemed to pulsate in unison. Presently the train came swinging round a curve some half mile away, and next instant the lamp in front of the engine was plainly visible from where Margery was standing. Another moment and she heard a faint report as the engine passed over the farthest signal which she had laid down, then another and another, each louder than the previous one. Before this, Margery, standing full in the pathway of the train, was waving her red light frantically. But already the fog signals—fog signals on a clear night—had warned both driver and guard that something must be amiss. Then came three short quick whistles from the engine and all the brakes were at once put on. Margery's red lamp had not been unobserved. She left herself with barely time to stand clear of the line, when the train came crashing past her. Thirty yards farther on it was brought to a dead stop. Before Margery could reach the train, the driver and guard were coming back to meet her, and sundry anxious heads were protruded through the carriage windows. In a few broken sentences Margery told her tale.

Four men armed with pistols had gone to the signal box at Ottergate Junction. Their object was to seize on the signalman, James Clinch, and take possession of his box for the time being. When the mail was nearly due, they intended to turn on the danger signal instead of showing the ordinary white light, and so bring the train to a stand close to where they were waiting for it. This done, they, being armed and knowing there were seldom many passengers in it, intended to rob the train. They had ascertained that some great treasure was to be conveyed by this particular train, and that treasure they were determined at all risks to make their own. Margery, knowing this, had ventured of her own accord to stop the train, and hoped she was right in doing so.

By this time the group had been swelled by three or four passengers. "Rum tale, Bill," said the driver, dubiously, to the guard. "What treasure have we aboard to-night more than any other night?"

"Don't know," answered the guard, "unless it be this young woman's love letters, or, maybe, her sweetheart come home from foreign parts."

"I can answer the question," said a grave voice from among the small group of passengers. "I and my partner are taking down to O—— Castle a large and very valuable box of jewellery. I think it quite possible that this young woman's story may be true, and I can only imagine that, by some unaccountable means, certain dishonest individuals, having heard of our journey and its object, have hit upon this bold scheme for getting possession of the jewels."

There was silence for a few moments; then the guard, addressing the last speaker, said: "Supposing the tale to be true, what do you think of doing, sir, to keep these rogues from getting hold of your property?"

"I hardly know what to do," replied the jeweller. "Perhaps the best plan would be for me and my partner to leave the train here and take our property with us. We could make our way to the nearest village in which there's a tavern, and, having knocked the people up, find shelter there till morning."

"Gentlemen," said the guard, "maybe you won't mind listening to a word from me. We've got Her Majesty's mails aboard the train, and we're bound to go through with them, if it's possible for man to do so. What I propose is this—that we all go back to our posts as if nothing was the matter, and proceed on our journey, and that when we get in sight of Ottergate signals, if we find them dead against us, as no doubt we shall do if this young woman's story is true, instead of coming to a stand, as we should otherwise have done, my friend Bill, the driver, shall put on all steam and run slick past the signal-box at the rate of sixty miles an hour. Let them fire at us if they like; they'll be clever shots if they hit us. Three minutes later we shall reach Bickmore, where we can rouse the police and put 'em on the track of these scamps?"

After a brief consultation all the passengers, including Mr. Howson, agreed to go forward with the train. Mr. Howson would have Margery in the same carriage with himself and his partner. Now that her share in the drama was at an end, all her anxious fears respecting her father came back with redoubled force. Her one wish was to get back home as soon as possible.

The guard's programme was carried out to the letter. The moment the distance-signal came in view, it was seen to be dead against them. Keeping on their course as though they had not seen it, a minute more brought into view the tall semaphore lamp, that shone, like a red, baleful eye, full of warning and menace, high above the signalman's box at Ottergate Junction. "Whip her up," said the guard, who had taken his place on the engine beside his friend. Accordingly Bill did "whip her up." Steam was put on, and they shot past the box at the rate of more than a mile a minute. A momentary glimpse was had of three or four dark figures crowded into the box, and then the darkness swallowed them up. Three minutes later the train drew up at Bickmore Station.

The would-be thieves had decamped long before the police could reach the Junction, but James Clinch was found there, bound hand and foot, but otherwise uninjured. Black Dick and his friends, although they got clear away for the time being, were subsequently implicated in some other affairs in which they were not so fortunate, and met with the reward due to their manifold merits. Black Dick was discovered to be an old offender who had chosen Cheverton as an out-of-the-way spot to lie by in for a little while till the heat of pursuit in another part of the country should have had time to grow cold.

George Fennell, coming to his senses about three o'clock in the morning, found himself, greatly to his surprise, lying under a hedge within a quarter of a mile of his own door. He had taken off his boots and his hat, likewise his coat, which he had folded up and used as a pillow. Then he had lain quietly down and gone to sleep. What had been his idea in so doing he never knew. The result of his freak was a sharp attack of rheumatic fever which laid him by the heels for three months, and left him ever after a sober and a wiser man.

Mr. Howson and his partner were rich men, and both of them were anxious to show their gratitude for the strange service done them by Margery Fennell. But there was nothing they could do for her, Margery said. They did, however, pay the doctor's bill for her father's long illness, and saw that he wanted for nothing during that anxious time. Mr. Howson offered to have Margery educated, with a view to improving her position in after life, but Margery said that her place was by her father's side, and that nothing should induce her to leave him. "I wish I could show my gratitude in some substantial way," said Mr. Howson to her one day. "Is there nothing I can do?"

Yes," said Margery, "there is one thing you can do," and never till that moment had the thought struck her. "My sister—let her be seen by some of the great London doctors. Oh! sir, if they could but cure her—if they could but make her poor back straight and strong, I should be the happiest girl in England."

Several years have gone by since the above words were spoken. Margery is the happy wife of James Clinch, and James himself is the station-master at Bickmore. But you would never believe that that tall and elegant-looking young lady had ever been the poor decrepit child who used to lie coiled up in an old clothes-basket and talk to the clock in the corner. Mrs. Howson, who has no children of her own, has adopted and educated her. The dreamy, fanciful child has found an outlet for her dreams and fancies in music. Already her playing is pronounced to be full of genius. People who ought to know say that she will one day develop into a great artist.



#### LOVE'S CALENDAR.

A young year's freshness in the air,  
A spring-tide colour to the wood;  
The flowers in spring-time most are fair,  
And life in spring-time most is good—  
For why?—I will not let you hear  
Until the summer is a-near.

A summer all of burning lights  
With crimson roses, passion-red,  
And moonlight for the hot white nights,  
And jasmine flowers, sweet, dew-fed.  
Why has each rose a double scent?  
You may divine when it is spent.

Autumn with shining yellow sheaves,  
And garnered fruit; and half regret  
To watch the dreary falling leaves  
And leaden skies above them set;  
And why e'en autumn can seem dear  
Perchance you'll guess, when winter's here.

Winter, in wide snow-covered plains,  
And drifting sleet, and piercing wind,  
That chills the blood within our veins,  
But our warm hearts can never find—  
Ah, little love, you guess, I know,  
What warms our hearts in spite of snow.

E. NESBIT.

## ONLY TOO TRUE.

IT was one of Mark's cloudy days. That was what he called them when he felt "out of order" and could not work. He had shut himself up in his studio and would not let me enter it. I felt sad and heavy of heart—perhaps because no one needed my presence—and taking the needlework, from which it seemed my fingers were never to be free, I went out and sat down under the shade of the sweetbriar hedge, in sight of our neighbour, Mr. Raymond's, orchard, whose wealth of snowy bloom made all the air redolent with delicious scent.

It was a heavenly day, so fair, so pure, so peaceful. Although but May, and all things wearing the calm beauty of that early time, the day seemed intensified in its loveliness by that soft, rich tint of the skies, and dreamy haziness of atmosphere more peculiar to an Indian summer. In the first moment of my enjoyment of its beauty there came a mingling of disappointment that Marcus had shut himself in from so much glory; that there was no hand to clasp, no eloquent eye to meet, no voice to join with mine in the cry which rose involuntarily from my heart, "Blessed be God for all His goodness!" Without these tastes of paradise—which surely such a day, such skies, bring—some of us anxious ones, almost weary of life's battle, might never have courage to fight on.

Around me waved a growth of tender grass; above, the bees hummed drowsily at their harvest among the blossoms, whose delicate petals ever and anon came showering down like a storm of snow-flakes; through the air the song of wren and robin carolled in melody. Far away, through an opening in the trees, I caught glimpses of Arcadian hills with their contented flocks and herds feeding quietly or reposing peacefully in the soft sunshine, which fell like a veil of golden mist over all.

Poor Mark! How all our thoughts turn upon the hinge of that secret joy or sorrow which lies concealed within us! I loved Mark now as well as in the days that I wedded him, but I did not honour him as I did then. Alas, that I should have grown to say it!—to find out how unstable he was.

Who so noble as Marcus Kerrison? who so stable, energetic, persevering as he—or as he seemed—when he came a-courting at my father's little rustic vicarage! "You won't object to me because I am in a shipping house, will you, sir?" he said to my father in his ingenuous way. "I gain five hundred a-year now, and I daresay I shall be a partner before long." And my father shook him by the hand and said he *honoured* men who were in business, and led useful lives.

So we married. And in less than a year Mark had thrown up his good post, and—taken to painting! Four years had rolled by since then; and Mark was twenty-nine years of age and I six-and-twenty. The two little ones, frail as those blossoms falling in the orchard, had been taken from us early, one after the other. Perhaps it was as well. Nevertheless my tears still fell fast for them.

Mark was one of those unfortunate beings who, possessing the soul of a true artist, are yet denied the power which makes an artist successful. He thought he was a genius. He thought that if he painted pictures, he should become rich and famous. When his mind became unsettled, he grew to hate the routine of the office, the plodding industry of his daily life. So he threw it all up one unlucky day, and set up a studio.

Mark worshipped the beautiful in nature and art, and his brain was ever teeming with grand and glorious conceptions; but when he sought to give them life, and form, and colouring, he so failed that often the object of his labour for weeks, perhaps months, was destroyed in a desperate moment of shame, mortification, and self-derision. His easel rarely held a finished picture, though it was never empty of one in some stage of advancement, exquisite in design but imperfect in execution. His table was strewn with sketches, beautiful and full of promise, but, like the pictures, incomplete. He had even made some attempts at statuary, but in this also he failed to shadow forth the visions of glory that shone in his soul.

Still Mark had a good, noble, generous heart, if he had not been led away by this *ignis-fatuus*—this idea that he was made to be great and famous! Meanwhile we must live: and our house had been given up, and its contents sold piecemeal, as we wanted money. "Never mind, Helen," he would say; "I shall have bags of gold some time." We lived now in a tiny cottage near to Henry Raymond's, who was the second partner in the shipping house.

It was wearing towards the close of that blessed afternoon in May, when I rose to go home, strengthened and comforted by my sweet communion with God, and rejoicing in the fresh manifestations I had witnessed of His infinite goodness and greatness. I saw nothing of Mark when I entered: he was still in his room. I set about preparing our evening meal—a labour quickly accomplished, for there was little to prepare. Tea and bread-and-butter do not take long—but I made a potato salad for Mark. How poor we had got to be! Mark had no income now but his exuberant, voiceless fancies; no prospects but the ruin of magnificent dreams; and these were airy things to live upon. Putting the vase of flowers upon the table as Mark loved to see them, I went up to call him.

He was seated before an unfinished painting of that scene in the temple, described by St. John, where the woman charged with sin is brought before the Master for judgment and condemnation. The drooping head, and penitent, deprecating attitude of the Magdalen,

and the frightened, baffled face of her last accuser retreating slowly from the temple, were perfect in themselves, but the figure of Jesus, lifting himself up to inquire of the woman for those who had arraigned her, was faintly delineated, and the artist's inspiration seemed to have failed when most needed. I often thought it a pity Mark chose these ambitious subjects: he might have succeeded better in simple ones. But it made him cross to say so.

"Shall you be *able* to do this, Mark?"

"No," he frankly answered. "I cannot pourtray the infinite mercy, tenderness, and compassion of that countenance—but I see it in my mind. It is of no use to drop your lip, Helen."

And so, after another day or two of struggling work—and failure, the picture, doomed to incompleteness, was thrust ignominiously aside, as so many others were thrust; and some fresh canvas appeared upon the easel.

These days—when a fresh painting was begun—were joyful days to Mark. This new subject was yet more ambitious than the other, and doomed, I knew, to earlier failure. It put me out of spirits: the wonder was that he could not see it himself.

There was nothing but bread-and-butter that evening; but Mark heeded it not. His face brightened as he sat opposite the open window, through which the glory of the fading day streamed, and he chatted gaily. I knew by the flush on his face that he had been planning some great, grand achievement, and that he was already reaping, in imagination, the fruits of labour not yet performed.

When the meal was over, I seated myself at the western window, on which the rosy hues of sunset were softly stealing, and took up the embroidery upon which I had been busy all the afternoon. It was a fresh piece—a baby's robe to be elaborately worked. Mark frowned.

"Always preoccupied, always at work!" he said. "I might as well be this little atom creeping upon the hem of your sleeve—see, Helen, how small it is," taking off a small insect. "I might as well be that, for all the heed you take of me and of my hopes."

"Dear Mark! How fanciful you are! Why, I am thinking all the time what a delightful thing it is to have you so near. I can work faster when you talk pleasant things to me."

"Work faster!" he repeated. "As if this world were nothing but a workshop. And how can I talk to you when you never vouchsafe me more than a flying glance, and when I cannot touch your hand but you snatch it hastily away to push that bit of sharp steel through a patch of muslin."

I laughed. "You do not want my hand, Mark. Staid old married people don't care to hold each other's hands as if they were young lovers whispering in the moonlight."

He pulled the cambric from me.

"Don't, Mark," I pleaded. "This is in a hurry."

"What's it for?"

"The christening robe for Mrs. Calthorpe's baby."

Mark started up in a passion. "Helen! How often have I told you I *would not* have you lower yourself to work for people! That upstart, vulgar Mrs. Calthorpe! Why, she's not fit to tie your shoe strings!"

"But she is rich, Mark. She pays liberally."

"I don't like you to do it, Helen. Just as if you were a common seamstress! Make me some fresh wristbands, if you must work."

Mark quite angered me. He often did. A child would have had more sense. And yet in most matters he had plenty of it.

"It is that I don't like my wife to do this, Helen. Surely we can manage without it."

"We must have bread, Mark. We are not ethereal enough yet to live without it."

"Bread! Is the money all gone that Hadley paid me for that little picture?"

"Why yes, Mark. Two-thirds of it went in things you wanted for your painting-room."

"I could not get on without them," reasoned Mark.

"Just so. But, Mark dear, we cannot get on without food—and it seems to me that I must find it."

Mark sat pulling at his whiskers and gazing at me. I knew how much he hated these domestic details. His tone became gentle—his eyes moist.

"When the picture I am contemplating is painted—which I have begun to day—when that gets into the exhibition, and purchased, then I shall repay you for all these sacrifices, Helen."

"You will never get a picture into the exhibition, Mark."

"How discouragingly you speak! It had not used to be so, Helen. Time was when you were interested in my plans, and cheered me on with hopeful and approving words."

"Till I found you were pursuing an ignis-fatuus," I said. "Till I found you were cherishing a vain delusion, listening to a phantom voice in your soul, which was luring you away from all that could make your life a true and useful one. I saw with your eyes then, Mark. I was sanguine as you: I had not learned experience. What have you accomplished in all these later years?"

He did not answer. His face was full of sadness.

"Oh, Mark, believe me! If in my secret heart I could acknowledge that Heaven had bestowed upon you a talent to cultivate, no words that I could speak would be too strong to encourage you, and no sacrifice that I could make, in the cause of your advancement, would be too great. But think of the years—the precious legacy of time—frittered away in idle dreams and useless toils. What have you accomplished? Has any good been gained? Has anyone been benefited by your labours? Have any great and noble thoughts

been disseminated through your devotions to this same art?—upon whose shrine you are daily sacrificing yourself.”

Still Mark did not answer. He walked away to the window, and stood gazing out abstractedly at the fast gathering shades of twilight.

“Won’t you speak to me, Mark?”

“I have nothing to say.”

“Oh, Mark!” I cried, “do not be angry with me! Hear me this once, and I will never allude to the subject again if you cannot be brought to see as I do. You are mistaking a fervent love and a warm appreciation of the grand and the beautiful, for the gift and creative power of genius. Indeed that is the simple truth, Mark. Listen, I entreat you, to the dictates of reason before it be too late.”

“What would you call reason?”

“This. Rouse yourself from these delusive dreams. Throw them off. Turn to some manly and useful employment, which will benefit yourself, and make the world better for you and for me.”

“What shall I turn to?” he asked, some derision in his tone. “Raymond told me yesterday his head gardener was going to leave: shall I apply for the post?”

“Better that than what you are doing now—frittering your life away uselessly. You must know, you must have learned that you will never do any good at painting. And oh, Mark, dear husband, think of the dread day that must surely come, when you will have to render up an account of your doings on earth!”

No reply. We sat a few minutes in silence. I went on with my work again. Presently Mark came across, kissed my forehead without speaking, and shut himself into his studio.

The days went on. Mark shut himself up more than ever; I tried to do well all I had to do, spite of my dreary heart.

Mark began to look haggard and feverish. There was a wild, restless light in his eye that pained and alarmed me. He was silent and gloomy: I do not think I once saw a smile upon his face. Even at meals he did not speak, and he ate nothing. He was not unkind; rather, sad, gentle. I sewed on, and wept in secret.

At last there came a break in this dreadful monotony. It was towards the close of a beautiful day in June—that sweetest of months. Alas! it had not been sweet to me. I was standing at the open door, plucking the yellow leaves from the honeysuckle which twined about the trelliswork, wondering whether I might venture to see after Mark, for he had not been down since early morning, when I heard his step behind me. Turning, I met his blazing eyes, and felt the clasp of his burning hand, as it took mine.

“Will you come to the studio, Helen?”

He pulled me almost fiercely after him, threw open the door, and drew me in.

"See, Helen, I *have* completed a picture. Your bitter words have wrought much good."

But as Mark spoke, he reeled with sudden faintness, and caught at the back of a chair. Steadying himself, he added, half petulantly—"Why are you looking with such a face at me? Look at the picture. I shall never paint another."

So I turned to the picture, not yet dry from the finishing strokes. The centre figure was a wild-eyed, eager-looking youth, stretching out his arms impetuously towards a beautiful phantom. A phantom whose bewildering face rose like an alluring star from a mass of clouds, which rolled even to the feet of the madly pursuing worshipper. At the right, and all unheeded, stood a form less fair and ethereal than the vision in the clouds, but calm, lofty, and dignified, with the implements of industry and labour scattered about her, and her great, earnest eyes gazing honestly and fearlessly into the misty distance. In the background stood another figure—a woman, with more of the mortal about her than distinguished the others, watching the deluded youth, and seeming to reason and to plead with him.

"Is it a true picture, Helen?"

"Yes," I said, drawing a deep breath, "it is a true picture."

"And what of the execution?"

Ah, I doubted *there*. But I praised that. How could I do else, seeing him as he was now?

"You look weary and sick, dear Mark, and you have tasted nothing to-day. Come down now: I have something all ready and waiting for you."

"No," he replied, "I want nothing but rest. My head feels strangely. Only rest. Let me rest!"

He staggered to our little bedroom, and lay down in his clothes. Only at night could I get him to undress, and some tea that I took him up he would not touch. Water, only water, he said: that cost nothing. All night he was tossing feverishly to and fro. In the morning I ran out and got the gardener's boy next door to go for Dr. Pine.

He came at once; he looked grave. Mark was very ill indeed, he said. It was fever of some kind—brain or nervous.

"What's amiss with Mark now?" asked Henry Raymond, catching me as I was washing out the tea-pot. "Pine says he is ill."

"Oh, very ill indeed; very ill! What shall I do, Mr. Raymond, what shall I do?"

"Come, come, Mrs. Kerrison, it won't do for you to break down, you know," he said, kindly. "And see—I have brought Mark in a few strawberries," putting the plate of delicious fruit in my hand. "Perhaps they may tempt him. Pine says he is feverish."

"And oh, as yet I have not been able to get him to touch anything," I sobbed; "he says it costs money. Even the toast-and-water he refused, because it had taken a piece of bread to make it."

"Coming to his senses at last, perhaps," said Henry Raymond in his pleasant manner. "But he must not be let starve, for all that."

"He has been painting a picture for several weeks past; has not, so to say, eaten and slept, only worked. And," I added, betraying the fear that lay on my heart, "I think it has turned his brain."

"Turned his brain?"

And, with that, I told this good friend of ours of what I had spoken that night in May to my husband. How bitterly I reproached myself for it none could know.

"Let me have a look at this picture, Mrs. Kerrison."

He went up on tiptoe to the studio, treading softly. Henry Raymond, who was a bit of a judge, stood examining the painting.

"A grand idea," he said at length. "But, as usual, very imperfectly carried out. This picture would not sell for five pounds."

I sighed: knowing it was only too true. Strawberries in hand, Mr. Raymond went on to the bedroom.

Alas, Mark was past eating strawberries. Tossing and turning on the bed in delirium, the fever had already laid sharp hold of him. It was brain fever: no mistaking that now.

"I'll send our old nurse in at once, my dear; she's worth her weight in gold in illness," said Mr. Raymond kindly as he went away. "And Mrs. Raymond will come in and see you as soon as she can. Please God, we will bring Mark through this."

Oh, it was a terrible illness! My poor husband! For long days and nights the fever held him. Now raving, now prostrate, there he lay. Sometimes he seemed to be wildly fighting with a mysterious, hidden Apollyon, whose fiery darts assailed him and threatened destruction. I thought, we all thought, he would have died in the struggle. And what would have become of him or of me without the Raymonds, and how much they did for us, heaven only knew.

The madness and the sickness passed away. Weak and helpless as a little child, Mark was given back to me. My whole soul went up in thankfulness.

One day when Mark had grown strong enough to sit at the open window, I was at work on a stool by his side; he drew me to him, kissed me tenderly, and told me how pale and thin I had grown.

"But it is all over now, Helen, that old mistake. I am going to be a man."

There was certainly a touch of bitterness in his tone. Was he speaking in reproach? My thoughts flew back to that long-past May night and to what I had said in it.

"Oh, Mark, forgive, forgive me!"

"Forgive you for what, my darling?"

"Don't you know? Don't you mean—what I said that evening?"

"What you said was just what I needed, Helen. I had been indistinctly thinking so myself for some little time before. I was not prepared to acknowledge the truth then, but I felt it in my secret

soul. I had so long cherished the hope of future fame and triumph ; I had dreamed such magnificent dreams, had built such glorious castles in the air : to give all up at once was too hard, too hard. But my senses have come to me, as Raymond calls it ; the mistake's over, the trouble at an end."

"And—you mean—that you shall not go on painting?" said I, my pulses beating wildly.

"Never again."

"And then ——?"

"And then, you. would ask, what am I going to do. How get bread and cheese—when I don't paint and you don't sew? for we will have no more working, Helen. Well, Raymond—how kind he has been!—has told me I may go back to them when I will : at the old salary, too. So, my love, our troubles are over."

Whether I laughed most or cried most I cannot tell. The sun at that moment burst out from behind a cloud in the blue sky : to me it seemed as if those bright beams came direct from our Father in heaven—an earnest of His love.

Some years have gone by since that day, and two little children are playing at my knee. We are well off now, for the firm is Raymond, Raymond, and Kerrison. And that last picture of Mark's hangs up in our dining-room : a memento, Mark says, of a man's folly.



### "SORROWFUL, YET REJOICING."

Oh ! sleepless nights, waiting on days of pain ! Oh, heart, sore rent !

Can these send forth a cry of thankfulness—more than content ?

Can the pale cheeks and lips yet wear a smile?—the feverish eye

Shed healing tears of joy, not burning drops of agony?

Does not the Saviour stand beside her bed, and ease each throe?

His presence just as real and comforting as when below,

Here on this earth, He moved, and soothed the smart of anguish sore

In those who touched with trembling faith the hem of robes He wore.

And our dear Master's gracious presence near ; His love our own ;

How should we fret at earth's hard chastisements—how make our moan  
O'er troubles which are "blessings in disguise," ruled by His hand?

His followers calmly face the fiercest storm, if He command.

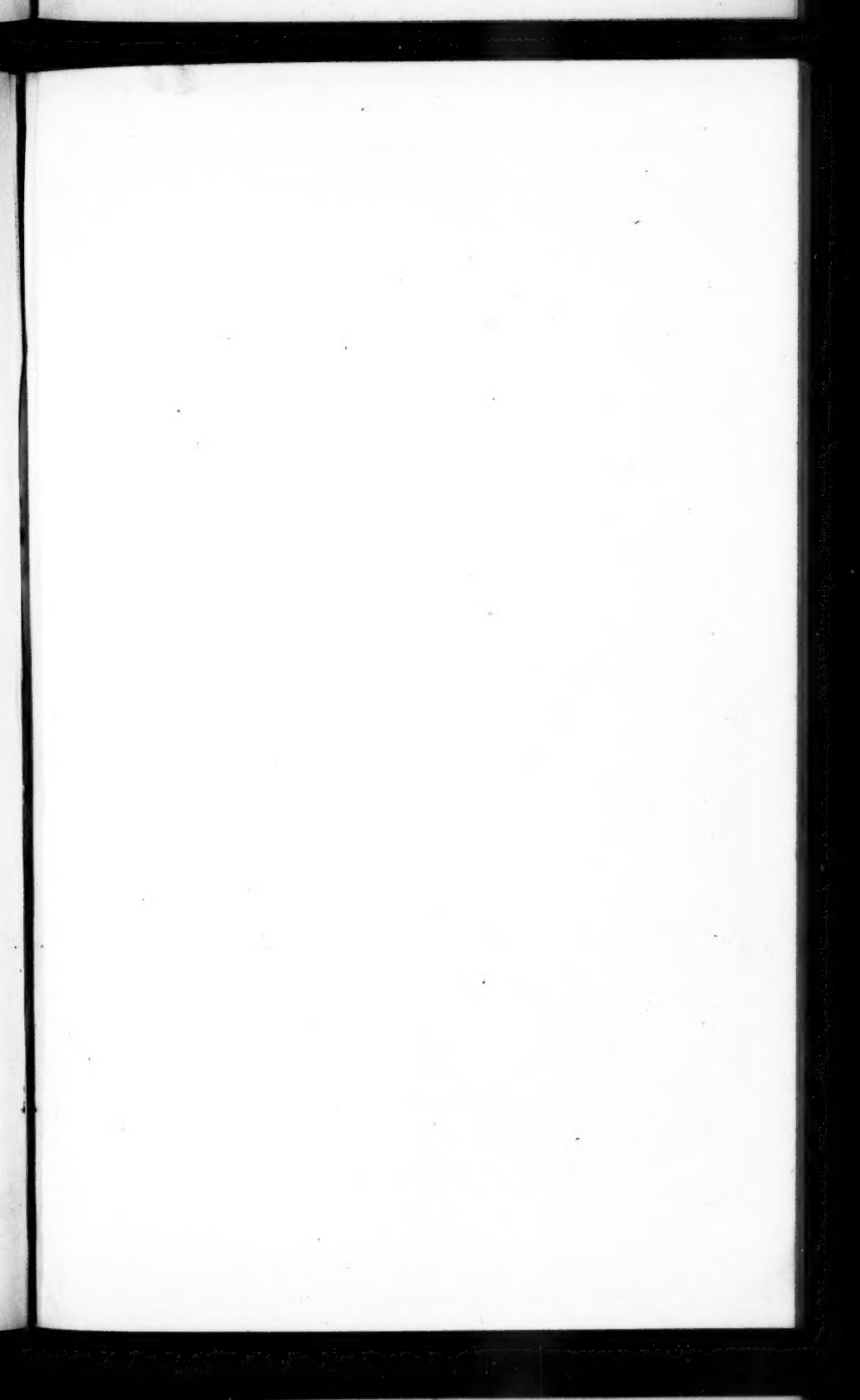
And she who lies upon her bed of pain is far more blest

Than hundreds walking heedless, midst life's joys, of His behest.—

Those joys, as flow'rs, fade quickly 'neath the touch : hers feed like fire

On all God sends of good or seeming ill, and never shall expire.

EMMA RHODES.





AT THE DOORS OF ST. IVE'S.

M. E. EDWARDS.

J. SWAIN.